


BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA

Thakkar Bapa

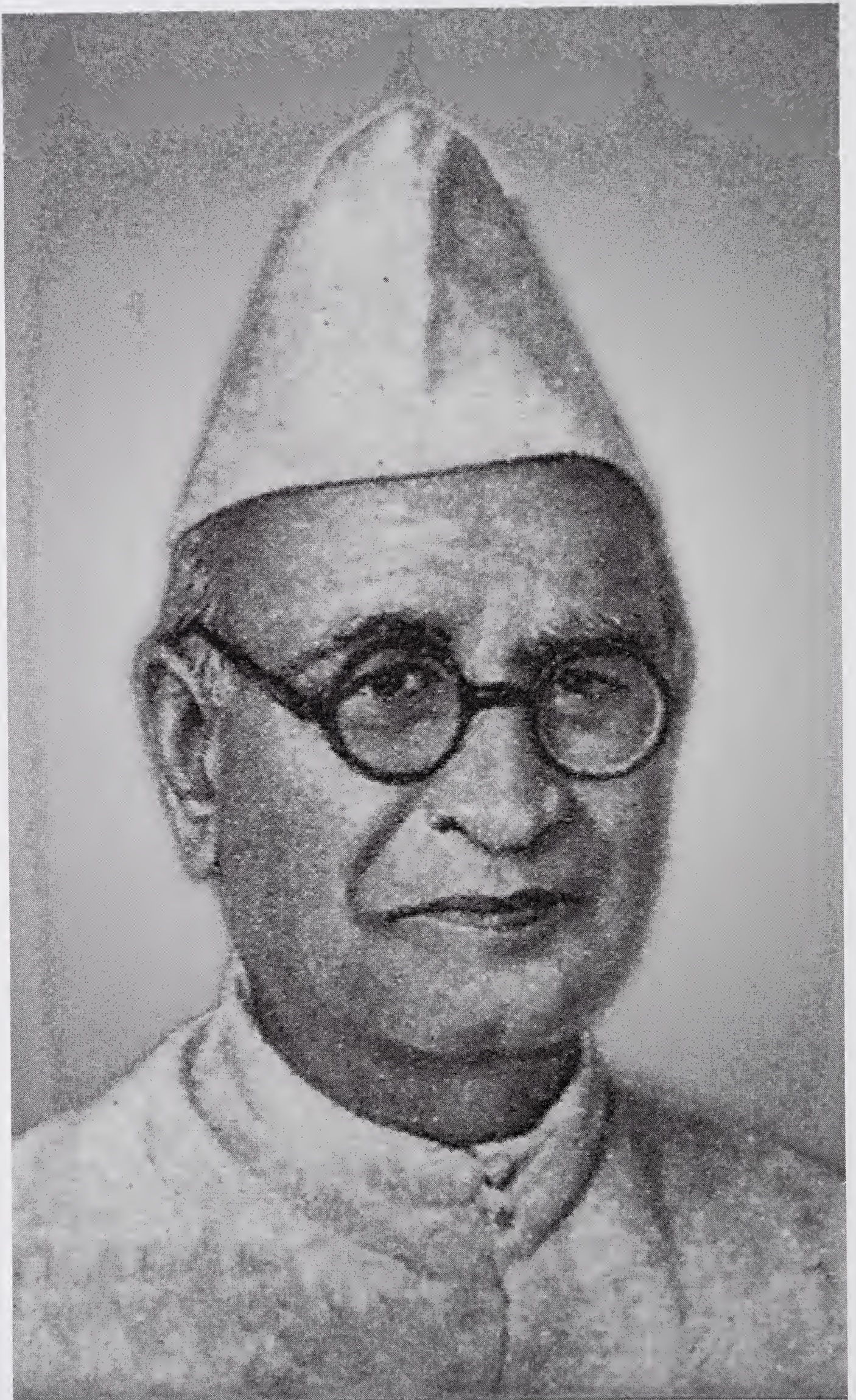
Viyogi Hari

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION



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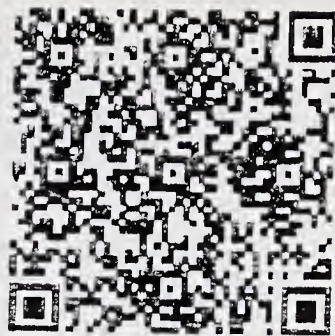
VIYOGI HARI

*Translated from Hindi by
Krishna Kumar Misra*



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About The Series

The objective of this series is to record, for the present and future generations, the story of the struggles and achievements of the eminent sons and daughters of India who were instrumental in our national renaissance and the attainment of independence. Except in a few cases, such authoritative biographies are not available.

The series is planned as handy volumes written by knowledgeable people, giving a brief account, in simple words, of the life, time and activities of these eminent leaders. The volumes do not intend either to be comprehensive studies or to replace the more elaborate biographies.

Preface

“There are some rare persons like Thakkar Bapa who are so absorbed in serving the people that it becomes difficult to think of them apart from their work. Such persons become an institution unto themselves. Men like Bapa solve the intricate problems of life through service during their lifetime and then whatever questions and problems may assail them, they are not daunted. Thakkar Bapa has so identified himself with Harijans, Adivasis and other depressed people in different parts of the country, in hills and forests, that it is no easy task to think of these people as separate from him. He was not merely interested in the pursuit of service of humanity, he was, in a way, lost in it. He went ahead, undeterred, on the path he chose and the sphere of his work expanded gradually. It is natural to be proud of and be enthused by Bapa. And one is envious too, of his energy and capacity to serve.” This is how Jawaharlal Nehru expressed himself on the occasion of Thakkar Bapa’s 81st birthday.

Gandhiji too believed that “Thakkar Bapa was born only to serve the depressed and the service he has rendered has taken India forward.”

That was the time when India had grown weary of British rule. Patriotic people were divided into moderates and extremists. Leaders of one group accorded priority to social reforms, while those of the other felt that the country should first be rid of foreign rule by whatever means possible, even though they were not opposed to social reforms. The country had woken from a slumber and was flexing its muscles. The mists had cleared, making it apparent that obsolete customs—the inequalities in

society and the strangulating slavery of foreign domination would have to go.

It was a time of social and religious renaissance. The clarion call given by Rammohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Dayanand and Vivekananda had stirred the nation. The burning question was whether it was possible to march to progress without taking the depressed and the backward classes along. And the answer was clear: this weaker limb of society could not be neglected; it had to be uplifted and made strong.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale was a far-sighted political leader and statesman. He had established the Servants of India Society primarily with political objectives. But he never forgot the weak, neglected section of society; his whole attention was rivetted on it. Popular leaders who devoted themselves to political awakening were getting all the acclaim and encomiums, denied to those who serve the people. Those days it was not the lot of resourceless social workers to be praised. They were, on the other hand, derided at every step and had to face obstacles and hardships constantly.

Amritlal Vitthaladas Thakkar was irresistibly drawn towards Gokhale. He gave up a lucrative job and the prestige that went with it. He was keen and impatient to devote his life to the service of the Harijans, Adivasis and the oppressed and depressed humanity, and he dedicated himself to this work.

Long and unswerving service of the people made him “Bapa” to every poor and suffering person. Even the father of the nation, Bapu, called him Bapa, though Bapa was younger than him by about two months.

The single-minded dedication, the steadfast, saintly devoutness and the untiring zeal with which Thakkar Bapa fulfilled his mission of service can indeed be called unparalleled.

But Thakkar Bapa was humility incarnate. Kaka Kalelkar had once requested him to write his memoirs, but Bapa had replied that it was not part of the work taken on by him. “There is nothing worth writing about in my life”, he said.

Bapa was no public speaker, nor did he write learned articles in a literary style. He acted upon whatever he thought was right and persuaded others to do the same.

Bapa left this world in peace and with satisfaction; the seeds of service he had sown and nurtured with his sweat had begun to flower and bear fruit in his life time. Which gardener would not be happy to see his garden laden with fruits and flowers, the luxuriant growth he had worked for? Bala Saheb Kher has aptly stated: “Few popular leaders who initiate great movements live to see their efforts succeed in their life time. Abraham Lincoln did not live to see Negroes as free citizens of America, nor could Gandhiji see, while he lived, India attaining an exalted place among the nations of the world. Thakkar Bapa is of course an exception. He witnessed the Harijans being almost freed from the stigma of untouchability. And he had the good fortune of seeing the Adivasis set out along the path to progress.”

Mr. Shantilal Shah wrote a detailed and charming biography of Thakkar Bapa in Gujarati which was published by the Thakkar Bapa Memorial Committee of Delhi in 1955. The Committee has also brought out a Hindi translation of the same. The present short biography of Bapa is largely based on Mr. Shah’s book. At many places I have benefitted from the Commemoration Volume, published in 1949 which was compiled and edited by Mr. T. N. Jagadisan and Mr. Shyam Lal. I also had the rare good fortune of sitting at Bapa’s feet for eighteen years and I learnt many a lesson in public service from him. I am therefore happy to be able to sing Bapa’s praises through this book.

- Viyogi Hari

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Birth Place and Childhood

Thakkar Bapa was born on November 29, 1869 in the Basani locality of Bhavnagar (Saurashtra) in a middle class family. The ancestral house of the family in which he was born is still there, though there have been a lot of changes in it since then.

Bapa's real name was Amritlal, his father's name was Vitthaldas and that of his grandfather Lalji Thakkar. He belonged to the Lohana community. Centuries ago, it is said, the Lohanas were Kshatriyas. Their forefathers came from the Punjab and settled down in trade and commerce in the nearby areas of Gujarat. Based on the areas where they settled down, the Lohanas were later divided into three main branches—the Kutchhis, the Halaris and the Ghogharis. Bhavnagar is the main centre of the Ghogharis and Thakkars belonged to this very branch.

Vitthaldas Thakkar was not affluent. He was in retail trade and speculation for a while and then took up a job as an accountant. For a number of years he served a banker, Seth Reghumoyee Dahya Bhonyee, belonging to his community, as an accountant on a salary of Rs. 25 a month. But he enjoyed popularity and prestige in Bhavnagar society. Of his own community he was an accepted leader. The Lohanas observe to this day, with minor modifications, the customs, norms and canons of behaviour laid down by Vitthaldas Thakkar. Most of his life was devoted to the service of his community. He organised the

Lohana Panchayat in Bhavnagar and set up a fund to help Lohana students. In 1906, he laid the foundation of Thakkar Damodardas Hemji Majithia Lohana Students' Bhawan and devoted the last years of his life to the service of this institution. Lohana students lived in this hostel without having to make any payment.

During the severe famine of 1900, Vitthaldas rendered great service to the members of his community. Thousands of men and cattle had perished for lack of food and fodder. Thousands were migrating from villages to towns in search of work and food. Some of them were Lohanas. Vitthaldas established a relief fund to provide succour to the suffering Lohanas and indefatigably collected donations for it. He also set up a free kitchen where six to seven hundred Lohanas were fed every day. Not satisfied with all this, he used to distribute boiled *gram* and *chapatis* to beggars at his residence.

Amritlal was then an engineer in the State of Porbandar. Soon after, he left for Uganda (Africa) on a three-year agreement. Regularly, every fortnight, Vitthaldas wrote to him about the severe famine conditions in the region. Amritlal was deeply affected by his father's letters and ached to be of some help to the suffering people. What he could not understand, however, was why his father devoted his energies to serving the Lohana community alone. Others too were famine stricken, and in need of help, he used to think. The young Amritlal resolved that, if ever in the future he got an opportunity to serve the people, he would not limit himself to any community and would without any consideration of caste or community, serve all human beings and, if need be, he would not hesitate to go to faraway lands to serve the poor.

Thakkar Bapa's resolve to serve the depressed and suffering humanity was mainly inspired by his father. But while Vitthaldas's work was limited to the service of his own

community, Bapa's aim in life was to embrace the entire backward, down-trodden humanity in his mission of service.

Bapa gave four great men the status of his mentors, Gurus, and his father led the list. He always said that whatever virtues (or vices) he had, were inherited from his father. In this context, he wrote: "My father served the people, was truthful and was plain-speaking. He loved order. To an extent, he was quick-tempered. I have inherited that temper and toughness. I have a tendency to burst out on slight provocations. I have tried hard to control my temper, but I have not been able to master it so far. I have my own experience to show how difficult it is to change one's nature. All the same, I also got from him the virtues of truthful behaviour, plain-speaking and orderly conduct of work and these have stood me in good stead".

From his father, Amritlal learnt many things even in his childhood—simple things like keeping shoes at their proper place, putting clothes properly folded, taking care of books and papers and stacking them at the appointed place and maintaining proper account of every paisa.

Vitthaladas had good qualities in abundance. His thrift and simple living were exemplary. Modest and unassuming, he was happy to suffer for others. He treated students at the hostel as a kind parent would. If one of them had a wound or boil, he would wash and dress it himself. He would stitch their torn clothes. He would sweep the rooms and the floor if the servant was late. There was no disorder in his life or work. He could not sit idle. For the hostel's upkeep, he would go from door to door, collecting funds. And Amritlal alone of all his sons and daughter inherited these virtues in ample measure; these were indelibly imprinted on his mind and character.

Amritlal's mother, Mooli Ba, was a religious lady with a longing for service. She shared the burdens and chores of the

hostel with her husband. She helped the needy and the poor and assisted the neighbours in their work. With meagre resources, she managed the family affairs so well that, despite simple food and clothes, no one felt dissatisfied.

Vitthaldas had six sons, of whom Bapa was the second, and one daughter. They were named Parmanand, Amritlal, Maganlal, Manilal, Keshavlal and Narayan and Jadi Behn. The parents were religious, devout Vaishnavites. They went to the Vallabhakul temple every day for the *darshan* of the deity. At home also there was the idol for worship.

In this very house in the Basani locality all the children were born and brought up. Naturally they had great fondness for their home. Bapa was especially attached to it. Whenever he visited Bhavnagar, he affectionately remembered all his childhood playmates, friends, relations and neighbours. Many sweet and happy memories of his childhood were associated with the family house. How could he, for instance, forget the blind, old Pani Auntie who used to spin her wheel on moonlit nights? The lady had known nothing but suffering in her life. She had none to depend upon and none to look after her. Even her eyes had betrayed her and yet she did all her work herself. She spent all her leisure spinning, and that was her only source of livelihood. Even as a child, Amritlal had great sympathy for this unfortunate aunt. About her he once wrote: "My mother would often help this blind old woman and spin for her. I still see, in my mind's eye, the scene of my mother spinning Pani Auntie's wheel after nudging her aside".

And another scene from his childhood memories was that of a sweeper who swept the streets for the municipality. This man, a guru or leader of the Dhedha community went from house to house, begging for food. Nobody touched him. Beyond a point, he could not proceed. He had to sit where children of the locality eased themselves. He made futile efforts to ward off the

cold by smoking stubs of bidis. Amritlal, even as a boy, did not like his sitting there in the filth. One day he recommended his case to his mother: “Ma, he has to sit in a filthy place. Should I ask him to sit on the stone platform of our house? This would not defile the stone; would it, Ma?”

Those were the days when untouchability was practiced very strictly. How could the mother accept this suggestion from her son? Efforts were, on the other hand, made to instil strongly the dogma of untouchability in his mind. Writing about this incident, Bapa said: “Dhedhas and their gurus can be nothing but untouchables. Touching them consciously is of course taboo. Even if the touch is unconscious or inadvertent, a regular bath has to be taken. Even if for some reason one cannot bathe, one has to sprinkle sacred water on oneself (for purification). I cannot describe how strongly this lesson was impressed upon me”.

II

Education

When Vitthaladas Thakkar did so much for the education of the boys of his community, how could he neglect the proper education of his own children? Financial resources were very limited, yet he tried to get his sons the highest education available, even though he had to borrow and mortgage his wife's jewellery for this. It was as a result of his efforts alone that, while there were hardly two or three matriculates in the entire Lohana community, among his descendents there were an engineer, a doctor, two Masters of Arts, two Bachelors of Arts and four who had passed their Intermediate examination. Vitthaladas's family can even today claim to be the most well-educated, not only among the Bhavnagar Lohanas but in the entire Lohana community of Kathiawar.

Amritlal's schooling began at the age of five. But he did not feel at home in the school. His father was however very strict and compelled him to go there. Amritlal was forced to put on his school clothes and his father would himself take him up to the gates of the school. If Amritlal obstinately refused to go, he would receive a thrashing and be forced to attend classes. Whenever Vitthaladas went out of Bhavnagar, he entrusted this job to some neighbour.

By the time he had finished primary school, Amritlal had begun to take interest in his studies. He was specially keen about mathematics. He could not take to Sanskrit and opted for Gujarati in its place in the High School examination.

Amritlal studied in an Anglo-Vernacular school from 1879 to 1882. The school building later housed the Barton Library. After that he joined the Bhavnagar High School, then known as Alfred High School. Mr. Jamshejtjit Conwala was the Headmaster. Amritlal was however most impressed by Mr. Chhaganlal Harilal Pandya who had translated *Kadambari* into Gujarati. Mr. Manilal Bhai Dwivedi taught Sanskrit. Besides being a scholar of Sanskrit, Dwivedi wrote verses in Gujarati. Bapa remembered any number of his poems by heart. One of these which he never forgot was: “Read all the books of the world and forget them, be a child even in your old age; that is true happiness; that is real enjoyment. Good or evil would then never touch you. O unwatchful worried being, soar high in the sky. What is it that worries you?”

Even as a student Amritlal was temperamentally very staid and serious minded. He was not interested in play or games nor was he very fond of company. He would go for long walks by himself. He wore the traditional dress in the school (*dhoti angarkha*, a turban in Bhavnagar style (*pugree*) and a *dupatta*. When in the class-room he would take off the *dupatta* and *pugree* and put on a cap.

He stood first in the matriculation examination and was awarded the Sir Jawantsinhji scholarship by the University.

Amritlal faced a serious problem after his matriculation. Family circumstances did not permit continuance of his studies. His elder brother, Parmanand had been forced to discontinue his education and had taken up a job as a teacher in the Wadhwan High School. Besides this, Parmanand had to take up odd jobs at the railway depot during his vacations to supplement his income.

Vitthalidas was unhappy because Parmanand had not been able to study further. He did not want the same story to be repeated in Amritlal's case, though he would have been a great

help to the family, had he taken up a job after his matriculation. On the other hand, the stipend of Rs. 10 per month was just not enough to meet the expenses, if Amritlal decided to go in for higher studies. In the end, Vitthaldas decided in favour of Amritlal continuing his education. He sent him to Poona to do a three-year course in engineering. Vitthaldas himself accompanied his son up to Poona. A separate room was rented for Amritlal. But he found it inconvenient to study there and shifted to the Kathiawar Club. This place was comparatively cheaper too.

Amritlal faced many hardships in completing the three-year course. The greatest of them all was the lack of money. But he did not lose heart. Before him were the examples of several poor students who had succeeded in getting higher education through determination, constant endeavour and hard labour. Amritlal knew of students who did not have enough money even for an oil lamp and had studied under street lights. The example of Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Justice Mahadeva Govind Ranade influenced Amritlal so much that they were almost gods for him. In Poona, he not only heard about them, but had an opportunity to see them. About one such occasion, Bapa wrote: “When I was a student in Poona College, I was living in the Kathiawar Club in Ravivarpeth. I used to go to the College on foot. One day when I was crossing the wooden bridge, I had the good fortune of seeing Justice Ranade. I had already heard a lot about this talented great man. I had also heard that he was the Guru of another great man, Gokhale. I remember very well that, on seeing him, I paid my respects to him and considered myself blessed”.

Amritlal was always interested in mathematics and he studied the subject with zeal. The engineering syllabus however included compulsory practical training. He did not relish the physical labour involved in using the hammer and such other work. He was not very efficient in drawing maps or sketches

either, but he had to do all this with perseverance to pass the examination.

College life had not changed his temperament and he was seriousminded as ever. He spent most of his time in studies or by himself and was not keen on sports. He did not possess many friends. But among the few he had was Balwantraai Thakore, the noted Gujarati poet. Thakore was studying arts. They did not attend the same college but even then they were together most of the time, eating and going out for walks together.

During his vacations, Amritlal utilised the leisure by teaching arithmetic and geometry to students in his family.

Amritlal had tried to live as economically as he could in Poona. Compared with today, the cost of living and college expenses were very low those days. Yet it was difficult to live on the scholarship money alone. Despite drastic cuts, his expenses mounted to Rs. 30 a month. For this, his father had to incur more debts and pawn his wife's jewellery.

In 1890 Amritlal completed the three-year course, passed the engineering examination and received the diploma of L.C.E.—Licentiate in Civil Engineering.

III

Family Life

According to the custom prevalent then, Amritlal was married when he was very young. Betrothed at the age of nine, he was married by twelve. There was no stigma attached to child marriage in those days. It was, on the other hand, a status symbol with the affluent and was esteemed as a hallmark of respectability. Social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy and Swami Dayanand had crusaded against this evil practice, but their influence had apparently not reached the Lohana community of Bhavnagar.

Amritlal was in the English primary classes when his father married him off. Considerations of economy and convenience led to five marriages in the family at the same time. On the advice of his elder brother, Vitthaldas arranged marriages of two of his sons, two sons of his brother and a son of his sister simultaneously.

Not that his marriage meant any immediate change in Amritlal's life. The boy was innocent of the purpose or responsibilities of conjugal life. After his matriculation, he spent three years at Poona as a student of the Engineering College and was thus saved from the evil consequences of child marriage. It was only after he had taken up a job that he had an opportunity to lead a normal married life.

Bapa himself later came to be a bitter opponent of child marriage. He once wrote: "Young men and women arrange their own marriages these days. There is freedom of movement and they meet each other and decide if they can adapt themselves to

each other or not. There can be two opinions about whether parents should arrange marriages of their sons and daughters when they attain maturity or whether the young should have the liberty to do it themselves. I do not want to raise the issue here. But child marriage must, in any case, stop. In no case should a boy of less than twenty years or a girl under eighteen should be married. I do not think there are two opinions on this.”

His wife’s family, like his own, was not very well off. His father-in-law was in service in Calicut. He made frequent visits to Bhavnagar in connection with the purchase of bamboos and timber and this kept the two families in constant touch.

Thakkar Bapa was not destined to have conjugal happiness. Jiva Kor, his wife, was constitutionally weak and in the large joint family proper care was not taken to safeguard her health after she delivered her only child, a son, who died before he was six. She suffered from leucorrhoea, which debilitated her. It was almost impossible to get her treated. Modesty, timidity and family custom would not let her talk about her complaint and Bapa could not take her to a hospital himself, as custom made it a parental charge. She began having hysterical fits.

In 1899, Bapa left for East Africa. He had applied for a job advertised by contractors for laying a railway track in Uganda and he got a three-year contract on a salary of Rs. 300. But it was considered risky those days for women to accompany their husbands to Africa. Jiva Kor stayed back in Bhavnagar.

Bapa wrote home regularly every fortnight and there was always a closed envelope for Jiva Kor. His letters were eagerly awaited and any delay always caused anxiety. Once when there was no letter for a month, the family got really worried, but soon three letters, delayed in transit, were delivered together.

It was only in 1903 when Bapa was posted at Sangli as State Engineer that he had some sort of peaceful family life, free

from worries. Jiva Kor was looking better, the climate suited her and, free from chores of a large joint family, she had some leisure. Bapa would take her out for evening walks up to the river Krishna. There they would pray at the local temple and sit on the river bank playing with the water. The orthodox rural Maratha public opinion was against the two going out in public together. Jiva Kor did not know Marathi and as there was no other Gujarati speaking person in Sangli, she felt lonely. Bapa therefore gave her as much of his time as he could.

This golden age of their conjugal life did not last long. In 1906-1907, Bapa got an appointment on a salary of Rs.100 in the Bombay Municipality. He was made an inspector on the Chembur Light Railway that carried the refuse of the city to Kurla. The couple lived at Kurla, just the two of them in a house. Bapa was new to the job and could not neglect it, and there was nobody to look after Jiva Kor whose health had begun to fail again. She would have hysterical fits and faint. Bapa would prepare the bed and close the doors before leaving for his office. Whenever she had a fit, she would lie down till it passed off. Then she would again attend to the household chores. This continued for a long time and hysteria gave way to tuberculosis. When Bapa found it impossible to look after her properly, he sent her to Bhavnagar where she died in 1909.

Bapa was thirty nine then. His father persuaded him to marry again. A 16-year old girl, Diwali, from the Ganatra community of Rajkot became his second wife. But this did not prove to be a happy marriage either, partly because of the wide gap in the ages of Bapa and his bride. Diwali died a year and a half after her marriage. This snapped whatever attachment Bapa had with family life and he refused to marry again. Later, he wrote: "I have remained single since 1912-13. I never felt the absence of wife or children and this detachment led to an inclination to renounce family life and to serve the people. It was

nothing but God's will, I think. I gave up family life at the age of forty five and devoted myself to social service. This was thirty four years ago. By God's grace these years have been full of happiness and contentment".

Thus began the phase of engineer Amritlal's life which made him "Bapa". The narrow confines of the family were broken and the people became his family. Wherever the poor and the depressed were in distress, he tried to be there to wipe their tears. His life of tireless service was like a beacon light to persons whose mission was public service, it was a source of encouragement and sympathy for the countless others who turned to him for help. Although he was unceasingly occupied in different activities, this did not come in the way of his affectionate relations with his family. Wherever he was, he wrote regularly to his elder brother, Parmanand, younger brother, Keshavlal, and his nephews, Kapil Bhai and Ramu Bhai and kept in constant touch with them. Whenever he could, he would go to Bhavnagar to meet them, or he would call them to Ahmedabad or Delhi—wherever he was. His love for the people and affection for the family were not mutually exclusive and there was a happy adjustment of the two in his own life. His younger brother, Manilal, had died at the young age of twenty-seven, leaving behind a twenty-four-year old widow and two daughters. Bapa was then in Uganda. But when he accepted a job in Bombay on his return, he called his widowed sister-in-law, Biju, and his younger brother, Narayan, to live with him.

Whenever he visited Bhavnagar during festivals, he would take presents for the family members, even though it meant a slashing down of his personal expenses. With the same affection, he would give financial and educational assistance to boys and girls of Bhils, Harijans and other backward communities. The line between his own smaller family and the larger family of the people had disappeared.

IV

In Employment

Immediately after passing out of the Engineering College in 1890, Bapa was faced with the problem of seeking a job. His father had run into debt in providing him with an expensive education and he could not sit idle waiting for a good opening coming his way. He began to work as an overseer on a monthly salary of Rs. 75 on the Barsi Light Railway in the district of Sholapur. He was zealous and devoted in his work and, as a result, got an assignment as an assistant engineer on the Bhavnagar-Gondal-Junagarh-Porbandar Railway. The head office was in a suburb of Bhavnagar. This meant a better job and an opportunity to live at home. Here too, he soon won recognition for honesty, efficiency and application.

A new track was being laid there and parts of a large number of agricultural fields were being acquired for the purpose. Many local farmers and landowners came to Thakkar Bapa with offers of bribe to save their fields. He declined to accept these sums and scolded them for stooping so low. The plan would not be altered by such offers, he told them plainly.

This honesty may have earned him respect among the people, but it did not go down well with his superior officers. In a department where such bribes were considered honourable incomes, his honesty amounted to doing others out of their share. Flaws in the work of this new engineer were assiduously looked for. He could not keep the job for more than two and a half years. There was violent difference of opinion on the type of

doors and windows to be provided in the quarters which were being constructed at a new railway station and he resigned. But this did not mean any hardship to Bapa who got an immediate offer to work as the Chief Engineer of Wadhwan State. His elder brother was a teacher in the state and Bapa accepted the offer. He served the state for about three years and constructed a number of buildings, including the new palace.

Here too his integrity was put to the test. A contractor came to him with a large sum with a view to getting his approval for inferior execution of some work. Bapa was furious and rushed at the contractor with his umbrella. The contractor reported to the State, but this only exposed his corrupt practices. From Wadhwan, Bapa went to Porbandar on a monthly salary of Rs. 200 and served there for five years till 1900. It was here that he met Dr Hari Shrikrishna Deva who became a life-long friend. Both of them were men of simple habits, honest and hardworking and with a natural urge to serve the down-trodden.

Bapa's last assignment in Porbandar was the construction of the Bhadar bridge. At that time the entire Kathiawar, including Porbandar, was in the grip of a severe famine. People were living on leaves and other inedible things. Hundreds of them turned up for work at the bridge.

Here Bapa witnessed an incident which shook him completely. A peasant couple died of starvation, leaving behind three sons, the eldest being about fourteen and the youngest only about three months old. When the elder brothers could not look after the young one, they buried him alive. Bapa could never forget this incident. He had come to know the pangs of hunger at an early age, and, later, whenever he served the scarcity-stricken people, he remembered it.

Though Bapa had a reputation for integrity, twice he accepted illegal gratification and he publicly admitted the fact and

apologised for it. He wrote: “An ordinary person, coming into contact with dancing girls as part of his profession, finds it difficult to resist the temptation; similar is the case of an engineer who deals with contractors. I remember I accepted bribes twice in my 23-year career as an engineer. The first time, I accepted Rs.400 from a contractor at the Bhadar Bridge project. My only defence is that I accepted the offer after the work had been completed and the final bills had been passed. The second time was when I went to Bombay for the purchase of Austrian cane chairs for the Porbandar State. I showed a higher price and saved Rs. 300 for myself. I do not remember having accepted any bribe at any other time. I admit my weakness publicly and apologise for it”.

The incidents only show that even honest persons like Bapa fall prey sometimes to human weaknesses. The difference between others and Bapa, however, is that while others do not admit the sin even to themselves, Bapa's conscience pricked him for a long time. Penance for a past mistake and a resolution not to repeat it make men great.

On leaving Porbandar, Bapa was again faced with the problem of finding a job. It was then that he saw an advertisement from some railway contractors in Uganda, East Africa. It was a British territory and engineers and other higher officers had been obtained from the U.K. Lower rank officers and skilled workers were being recruited from India. Thakkar applied and got a job carrying a salary of Rs. 300. His father and other family members were in a quandary. They were hesitant about sending Amritlal so far away. Not that Africa was an unknown continent; any number of traders from Porbandar and Verawal, including many Kutchhi Lohanas, used to go there, and secure business worth lakhs of rupees. But few had gone out from Bhavnagar. Few educated men like Amritlal thought of going there.

There was another difficulty. Amritlal's family was Vaishnavite and observed a very strict code about eating. Sending Jiva Kor with him could not even be thought of as Africa was considered to be a dangerous land and it was not customary for men to take their wives along with them there.

Ultimately, Amritlal was permitted to go. A Brahmin cook was engaged on a three-year contract to accompany him. He left for Uganda when he was hardly thirtyone.

There he found that most of the workmen laying the track were Punjabis who were sturdy and worked better than those from other provinces. They did not have much taboos about food. There were also a large number of men from Bengal, U.P. and other provinces engaged in survey, inspection, work measurement, station administration and similar jobs. Far away from their homes, these people tended to forget their family traditions and community customs. They tried to imitate the British. Most of them were already non-vegetarians, but they also began drinking and having intimate relations with African women. Amritlal loathed immorality.

For Amritlal there were so many other new things to see in East Africa, beautiful dense forests, huge lakes, giant trees, cavorting herds of giraffes, strange people with strange customs living in the very lap of nature. He went to see Victoria-Nyanza lake about which he had read in his geography book. The beauty of the immense lake was breathtaking—huge waves throwing up silver foam, sparkling water, the pleasant journey on the gliding motor launch. It was a great and beautiful experience. Whatever he saw that was new and noteworthy, he described at length in his letters to his father, who, in return, gave him information about the family and the happenings in the country. Kathiawar was then in the grip of a terrible famine and Vitthaldas wrote about it in detail to his son, including a narrative of whatever he was doing for the suffering Lohana community.

Many people think that Bapa did not have an interesting style of writing. Far from it. Unfortunately, his letters, full of lively descriptions of nature's beauty and attractive places in Africa, were not preserved or else they would be an important contribution to literature. His nephew, Kapilbhai, was a regular reader of his letters and African diary. He says: "The letters and diary were full of interesting descriptions and I was so fond of them that I devoted hours to reading them. They had the attractive readability of a story".

When his contract was completed and Bapa returned to India he had no savings. It was usual to expect that a person who had gone abroad for earning must have saved a substantial sum. Amritlal, however, had to send a wire from Bombay to his brother, Parmanand, asking him to bring some extra money with him as he did not have enough for the railway fare from Wadhwan to Bhavnagar. He had, however, brought presents for his nephews, nieces and other members of the family—clothes of tree barks worn by African tribals, their quaint jewellery, walking sticks made of rhino hide and other new things not available in India.

His sojourn abroad had not led to snobbishness or ostentation; if anything, this simple man had grown more staid and sober. Kapil Thakkar narrates a small incident illustrating Bapa's austere simplicity: "A heap of clothes to be sent to the washerman had been collected and the bundle was pretty big and heavy. Either the washerman had to come to take it away or we would have to carry it to his house. We had no domestic servant. It was a morning for going out on a visiting round to some friends and we were to pass by the house of the dhobi. Some one suggested that we would have a word with the washerman and ask him to come and take away the bundle. But why not carry it ourselves as we go, proposed Amritlalbhai. No one had ever thought of this. We were too respectable a party to carry a heavy

bale of dirty clothes through the thoroughfares of Bhavnagar in broad daylight. But Amritlalbhai lifted the bundle on his back and we started. Many people greeted us on the way and naturally some of them ventured to ask what it was that we carried. Amritlalbhai coolly replied: 'Clothes for dhobi'. Of course, the rest of us shared the labour on the way. I was then ten years old. This was an object lesson for the whole family."

Bapa did not have to wait long for a job on his return from East Africa. His old friend, Doctor Hari Shrikrishna Deva, was the Chief Medical Officer in Sangli State and through his efforts Bapa was posted there as the Chief Engineer. That his two-year stay at Sangli was the golden period of his married life has already been stated. It was for the first time the couple had the freedom to live away from the rigid discipline of the joint family.

The Sangli period was important from another aspect as well. It was here that he came into contact with G. K. Gokhale and D.K. Karve for the first time. Gokhale was to initiate him into a life dedicated to the service of the people. As for Prof. Karve, Bapa has described him as his fourth Guru. He was a noted Maharashtrian social reformer. His contribution to women's education in the country is immortal. He founded the Indian Women's University at Poona. He himself had married a widow and thus set an example to be emulated. He was then a teacher in Fergusson College at Poona. He taught during the day and went five miles back to the widow's home in the evening. There was never a breach in this regular routine during his twenty years of service there.

Bapa too greatly sympathised with widows. He had known their plight at first hand in his own family as his younger brother's widow lived with him. This sympathy brought the two great social reformers closer and the acquaintanceship ripened into close personal friendship before very long. Karve began visiting Bhavnagar and a beginning in women's education was made

there. Later, at Bapa's instance, Harijan widows were also admitted in the Home at Hingne Bhadrak.

Writing about his association with Bapa, Karve says:

“My first contact with him was at Sangli. I was then giving all my time and attention to widow remarriage. Mr. Thakkar was a great sympathiser of widows, which circumstances naturally brought him and me closer together. The Home for widows at Hingne also made a strong appeal to him. And acquaintanceship then formed ripened into close personal friendship before very long.

During my visits to Bhavnagar, I used to bring the cause of the Indian Women's University to public notice with a view to placing it on a sound financial footing. And if my appeals evoked a generous response from the Bhavnagar public, it was largely due to Mr. Thakkar's influence and the ceaseless efforts of his elder brother, Mr. Parmanand Thakkar.

Mr. Thakkar's taking up the secretaryship of the Harijan Sewak Sangh which came into being after Mahatma Gandhi's historic fast in the Yeravada prison in 1932 forged another link between us. Till then, the Home at Hingne could not boast of any untouchable among its inmates. Not that the doors of the Home were deliberately closed to them. The fact simply was that no Harijan girls had sought admission to the Home. Nor had the authorities of the Home, on their part, ever gone out of their way to make the existence of the Home known among the so-called untouchables and to invite them to take advantage of the facilities it offered. Mahatmaji's fast did not leave the Home uninfluenced. And the

admission of Harijan girls to it soon followed, though not without some temporary excitement in the Home itself. I have no doubt the authorities of the Home were emboldened to take this somewhat radical step because of Mr. Thakkar's encouragement".

Bapa's first opportunity to meet Gokhale came on November 13, 1904. Gokhale was on a visit to Sangli and Bapa wrote to him seeking an interview. The meeting lasted fifteen minutes. It had no specific purpose behind it except that Bapa was keen to have a *darshan* of the great man whom he had held in worshipful regard for years.

He was living a happy and settled life at Sangli when there was a disagreement with the British administrator. The ruler was a minor and the British Agent was in charge of the entire administration. Bapa had to leave the job. But soon after leaving Sangli, he found a job with the Bombay Municipality.

He was posted at Kurla and entrusted with the task of inspecting the garbage train. The light railway carried the refuse of the whole of the city of Bombay and dumped it near Chembur to be buried in large pits dug for this purpose. It was a dirty work. Bapa's job was to ensure proper disposal of the refuse and the cleaning of the wagons. It was here that he came in direct contact with the untouchable employees of the municipality, and he closely studied their living conditions.

Most of the Bhangis (sweepers) engaged here were from Gujarat and Kathiawar. A large number of Dedhas, Chamars, Bhangis and others had reached Bombay during the famine of 1900 and they had accepted whatever jobs were available. They had settled down there and the lure of jobs had brought many others in their wake, forsaking their traditional professions. This gave rise to slum dwellings in the great city of Bombay.

These slums were located away from the city, on the way to Chembur. The dwellers had used beaten down canisters, rags of sacking and hessian bags, mildewed and decaying timber and bamboo splints to set up their colonies of hovels and huts huddled together. Whole families of parents, sons and daughters, parents-in-law, brothers and sisters managed to live somehow in a hut. From early morning till late evening they were engaged in carrying refuse and garbage and washing baskets that carried night soil. They had no time nor inclination to keep their homes or themselves clean. It was a living hell and the pitiable conditions moved Bapa tremendously. He could not understand why the untouchables had exchanged their much cleaner existence in the villages for this squalid life. He was eager to improve their living and working conditions but did not know how to go about it. Then he met Shinde, his second Guru, from whom he learnt the great lesson of serving the Dedhas, Bhangis, Chamars, Mahars and other untouchables.

Other miseries also plagued the Harijans who lived in Bombay. They had to pay huge sums as “Dasturi” to secure these dirty jobs. Most often they borrowed from Pathan and Marwari usurers to pay this bribe and were unable to return the sums in their life-time. Debt redemption was the main problem as far as these Harijans were concerned.

Shinde was a god for these depressed people. To serve them was his life’s mission. Later, he set up the Depressed Classes Mission, but even before that he steadfastly fought against the harmful customs and practices like untouchability prevalent in the Hindu society. He opened a number of schools for Harijan children in Bombay. A hostel had also been established in the city for Harijan boys. He had opened similar schools in Rajkot and Bhavnagar. The committee he had organised for the Depressed Classes Mission was headed by honourable Justice Sir Narayan Ganesh Chandavarkar.

Shinde, who used to wear a red turban like a Salvation Army man, anticipated Mahatma Gandhi in Harijan uplift and removal of untouchability and paved the way for him. He was inspired by Col. Olcott of the Theosophical Society who had established schools for Harijans in Adyar (Madras).

Some 250 conservancy workers of the Bombay Municipality worked under Bapa. Shinde opened a school for them too. He persuaded Bapa to set up a similar school for Harijans hailing from Gujarat and Kathiawar and helped him in every way.

Paying tribute to him, Bapa wrote: “He was the second of my four Gurus (the first being my father). I learnt public service at his feet. He was younger than me but he was far ahead of me in the work of national service. He was the father of the movement for the welfare of depressed classes in Bombay.”

While working in Bombay, Bapa also met his third Guru—Deodhar Dada. Deodhar was also deeply interested in social service. He had set up a Seva Sadan in Poona. He was a member of the Servants of India Society and had established its branch in Bombay. Bapa used to go to him to discuss problems relating to uplift of the depressed communities. With the responsibilities of a large joint family on him, Bapa was then in no position to become a regular member of the Society. But he took keen interest in its activities and regularly paid a part of his salary to it.

It was while the foundation for his future life as a social worker was thus being laid that there was a rapid deterioration in his wife Jiva Kor's health. Bapa was then getting unsolicited promotions in service. His superior officers were impressed by his integrity, honesty and orderliness. After only a year of service here, he was transferred to the road building section with a raise of Rs 100 in his salary. The third year he was promoted as the Road Superintendent and his salary was now Rs 300. He worked

hard and honestly at this post for about a decade. The roads as well as the lot of the sweepers who worked on them greatly improved during this period.

Bapa's was a responsible position and he spent over Rs 10 lakhs annually on behalf of the municipality. But he shunned bribery. Once a fruit vendor, an unauthorised stall-holder on the footpaths, sent some dry fruits and silver ware to his residence. Bapa was furious when he came to know about it and sent the things back immediately. He chased away a contractor who had brought some silver utensils to him.

His attachment to the poor led to a growing aversion for wealth and he spurned opportunities of great financial success. When he declined a job carrying a salary of Rs 500 in Porbandar, he was requested to name the figure himself and the State would be willing to pay it. But he did not give in to the temptation.

Family circumstances were, in the meantime, giving a particular direction to his life. Jiva Kor was sent to Bhavnagar for a change as her health was failing. She died there in 1909. His father, Vitthaldas, had renounced all other work and devoted himself to God and service of the community. A younger brother, Keshavlal, had completed his medical studies and was now in service. His mother was old and feeble. And Bapa was gradually developing a detachment from the family. His second marriage could not keep him away from social service for long either.

Bapa's association with Deodhar had grown considerably. He would regularly visit the Society's office in the evenings to discuss various problems relating to Harijans. He had begun to donate half his salary, about Rs 150, to various social service organisations. The household responsibilities had devolved on his younger brother, Narayan, who was teaching in a school in Bombay. The association with Deodhar grew into an intense desire in Bapa to devote all his time and energies to the service

of the depressed people, like other members of the Society. So he wrote to his father seeking his permission: “Younger brother, Keshavlal is well settled in his profession and capable of shouldering the responsibilities of the family. If you approve, I would like to get rid of the shackles of employment and devote myself to the service of the poor, depressed people”

Bapa’s social service proclivities were not unknown to Vitthaldas. He did not want to hold his son back but it was difficult for him to accept the type of work his son wanted to take up. He himself had been engaged in social service all his life, but he had set a limit to it which he did not want even his son to cross. He wrote back asking Amritlal to keep the job for the time being. “Do not take this step as long as I am alive. And how long would I live now? Not many years”.

The son accepted the advice. Soon after, Vitthaldas went to Bombay and began living with his son. There he had an attack of paralysis which kept him bed-ridden. The body was wasted, he could not even speak. The way Amritlal looked after his ailing father was worth emulating. He himself attended to all his needs; he would wash him, massage him, press his aching feet, feed him, prepare his bed and help him to sleep.

During this time, in 1912, there was an incident when Bapa was compelled to tell a lie for his father’s sake. The Aryan Brotherhood had a dinner to which Hindus of all castes and communities were invited. Bapa attended the dinner. Two other members of the Kutchhi Lohana community, Mr Gopalji Ramji and Manji Govindji Seth, also joined it. Balu, the great Harijan cricketer, and his brother were also there. The names of those who were at the dinner were published in the newspapers the next day. It took the town by storm. Those were the days of iron discipline of community panchayats. Dining with persons of any other community was beyond imagination, to say nothing of eating with untouchables.

These panchayats were indignant at this sacrilege and resolved to bring the “culprits” to book. Bapa had to appear before his community panchayat. He was fined Rs 500 for joining a dinner with untouchables. As a penance he was told to shave off his head.

Bapa was in mental agony. He was not sorry for his action and did not think that he had committed any sin in attending the dinner. He considered it to be an act of social reform. He was however worried on another count. If he was ostracised, it would be a terrible shock for his father, which might even cause his death. And none from the community would attend his funeral.

Filial love had its way. Bapa did not want his father to be worried in his old age. With a heavy heart he accepted the punishment, paid the fine and shaved off his moustaches as penance. When his father inquired about it, Bapa said someone from his father-in-law’s family had died, making it necessary to have a clean shave on the tenth day.

Later, the elders of this very Lohana community panchyat honoured Bapa for publicly eating with Dhedas, Bhangis and Adivasis and declared that the Lohana community felt proud and honoured at Bapa’s service to the Harijans and Adivasis. These branches of the Lohana community—the Kutchhi, the Ghoghari and the Halai—presented a joint welcome address to Bapa. What a change!

Vitthalidas did not live long after this incident. He died in 1913, and this snapped Bapa’s last emotional tie with the family. He came out of the restricted family circle and embraced the larger family of the entire people. He did not accept his younger brother Keshavlal’s “practical” advice that he should stick to his job for another five years. Keshavlal had suggested this so that Bapa could be entitled to a pension and would not have to depend on others.

In December 1913, Bapa wound up his Bombay household and prepared himself for the great renunciation. Bijubai, his younger brother's widow, was to be sent to the Vanita Ashram. Other brothers were well settled. He had no more worries or responsibilities.

Bapa had, in the beginning, been thinking of working as a candidate member of the Society after taking long leave from his office. If for some reason he was not accepted by the Society as a full-fledged member, he could go back to his job and continue to help the Society financially. But Gokhale rejected the proposal. He said that it was only after resigning his job that he could be enlisted as a candidate member of the Servants of India Society. Bapa was in two minds. If after the completion of the period of candidate membership, he was not found fit to be a regular member, what then?

At last he took the decision and resigned his job under the Bombay Municipality on January 14, 1914. The authorities of the municipality and other officers tried to persuade him to continue for another five years to entitle him to a pension. The Harijan and other low-paid employees of the municipality also requested him to stay on. But Bapa was not dissuaded. He explained to the Harijans that he was leaving this service only to serve them better from outside.

This sacrifice on Bapa's part acted like magic. He was given a very affectionate farewell by the employees and several organisations held functions to honour him. Bapa wrote to Keshavlal: "If I stay here any longer I would be spoilt".

And thus the great Karmayogi marched out on his path of public service, casting all his doubts aside.

V

Dedication

Bapa had held Gokhale in very high esteem ever since he heard of him. He had been an admirer of the Servants of India Society from its inception in 1908. His bosom friend, Dr. Hari Shrikrishna Deva, was devoted to Gokhale and he told Bapa a lot about his work and personality when both of them were in Sangli. It was Dr. Deva who introduced Bapa to Gokhale on November 13, 1905 when the latter was on a visit to Sangli. Gokhale was then just thinking of setting up the Society.

Both friends had decided together to give up their jobs and join the Society. Dr. Deva had, even earlier, assured Gokhale about his intention and Gokhale had mentioned it in one of the annual meetings of the Society. But Bapa was, by nature, reserved and unassuming. It was, in fact, Dr. Deva who had to apply on Bapa's behalf for membership through the following letter:

21 January 1914

My Dear Sir,

Mr. A. V. Thakkar, Road Superintendent, Bombay Municipality, has asked me to request you on his behalf to be so good as to admit him in the Servants of India Society. He accepts all the vows of the Society. I will see that his regular application is submitted in a couple of days. Mr. Thakkar has sent in his resignation from the post he now occupies (in the Bombay Municipal Corporation) and will be free on the 1st of February, 1914.

Yours sincerely
H.S. Deva

Social service was the main object of the Society. Gokhale had himself prepared its memorandum and described the object as “to train men for the work of political education and agitation, and to promote the national interests of the Indian people through all constitutional means.”

After some time a significant change was made in this article and it now reads: “The object of the Society is to train national missionaries for the service of India and to promote the true interests of the Indian people through all constitutional means.”

The scope of work in the Society had thus, from the very beginning, been enlarged to include the service of the nation with a missionary spirit. It was this missionary spirit of service that had attracted Bapa towards the Society. His Guru, Deodhar Dada was its great missionary. Gokhale’s successor, Srinivasa Shastri, in a different context, underlined the primacy of missionary work when he wrote: “He (Gokhale) accorded equal importance to social and political reforms. The Bombay branch of the Servants of India Society stressed the social aspect more and this had his concurrence.”

It was the Society’s practice to admit to its ranks only young men of the required qualifications possessing the proper spirit of service. When Bapa applied for admission to the Society, he was fortyfive. By ordinary standards, a person of this age is not regarded as young nor is it expected that he would work hard with alacrity and in a disciplined manner. Such doubts were entertained by some members of the Society about Bapa. Srinivasa Shastri, who had never met Bapa before, was one of them.

Applications for admission were considered by the Executive Council of the Society. All the members were expected to attend the meeting and give frank expression to their

feelings about the fitness or otherwise of a would-be member. But for some unavoidable reason, Srinivasa Shastri could not attend the meeting at Poona in which the applications of Dr Deva and Bapa were considered. He had, however, written his reactions in a letter to Gokhale. The letter that Gokhale wrote to Shastri sheds light on his feelings towards Bapa. He wrote: "As regards Mr Thakkar Bapa, he is one of the ablest officers of the Bombay Municipal Corporation and is certain to rise much higher than his present post carrying a salary of Rs 300 a month. He has been working with Mr. Deodhar for the last two years in several of our Bombay activities and he has been doing this in addition to his official work. This should satisfy you that he has far more energy than an average man. Deodhar speaks of him in the highest terms. He is an intimate friend of Dr. Deva and they both decided to join the Society together. Neither of them has any ties now and both will live in the work of the Society. If they had wanted to lead an easy life, they certainly would not have sacrificed their comfortable incomes and come forward to join us on a pittance. Both of them will proceed to Allahabad almost immediately after admission to take up famine relief work there. This should suffice to satisfy you that there need be no fear that they will shrink from hard work ...I tell you it is men of Thakkar's type that will really build up the reputation of the Society. He is not only able, energetic and enthusiastic, he is also earnest, high-minded and unselfish".

An expert jeweller had rightly valued a flawless gem. On the very day Dr. Deva and Bapa applied for membership, they were accepted. This removed all the fears in Bapa's mind about the problems he would face if his application was to be rejected.

On his return to Bombay, Bapa immediately wrote to his brothers informing them that his application for membership of the Society had been accepted. The letter, written in English, is one of the Bapa's memorable ones. It reveals his complete

dedication to the service of the people. This could no doubt be an inspiration to those intending to traverse the same path. The letter reads:

Dear Brother,

Bombay
January 5, 1914

It pains me to write this letter and I believe it will pain you all very deeply to read its contents. I wish someone else had communicated this to you. But, after all, it falls to my lot to perform this sad duty.

I have resigned my service from the Bombay Municipality and shall be relieved from my duties on the 2nd February and shall immediately join the Servants of India Society. I have consulted no one in this matter and have acted entirely according to the dictates of my conscience. I may have erred if the voice of my conscience errs. Whatever it may be, I can ignore the voice no longer.

In the course of my service, I have formed strong ties of affection with my subordinates, and not only that, I have learnt to love the very roads in my charge, inanimate as they are. It pains me more to part from my servants and roads than it does to part from my kith and kin, and as a brother-officer told me yesterday, I feel as if I am sinning against my hundreds of subordinates and thousands of coolies. I feel as if I am deserting these people who have ever showered affection on me and have blessed me from the bottom of their hearts. Some say that I shall not be able to do as much useful work out of service as I can do in the service, with the position and prestige attached to it.

But I am fully convinced that India wants whole time and devoted workers, and not part-time or spare-time workers, and unless these are secured, no real progress can be made. There

is plenty of money for real workers. Mr. Gokhale can command thousands and lakhs of rupees, but he cannot secure devoted men. So, if, in dedicating myself to this cause, I am erring, I am erring for a noble cause and with the best of motives.

If I owe any money to you, please let me know in time, for I am finally clearing my accounts with all. It goes without saying that those individuals and institutions that it was my good fortune to serve with money hitherto will have henceforth to do without my help.

My struggle is now over. All parting in life is sad, but I leave you for a noble cause, and hope to go with your blessings.

Yours affectionate brother
Amritlal

At long last, the time came when the first member of the Society, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, administered the vows to Deva and Bapa as members of the Society on February 6, 1914, and they joined the ranks of the great servants. They were asked to take the following seven vows:-

1. For me the country will come first and I will give my best to the service of the country.
2. I shall not try to take any personal advantage in serving the country.
3. I shall consider all Indians to be my brothers. I shall work for their betterment without consideration of caste or religion.
4. My needs and, if I have a family, my family's needs will be looked after by the Servants of India Society; alternatively, I shall be satisfied with whatever

salary the Society decides to pay me. I shall not waste my energy on earning for myself.

5. I shall lead a pure life.
6. I shall not indulge in any dispute with anybody.
7. I shall always keep the objects of the Servants of India Society in mind and shall devote myself completely to the interests of the Society. I shall do all that I consider proper for its progress. I shall not indulge in any activity which runs counter to or is not in accord with the aims and objects of the Servants of India Society or its objectives and politics.

After taking the vow, Bapa relinquished his separate residence the same day and shifted to the office of the Society.

Unfortunately, Dr. Deva's association with the Society was not to last very long. The cruel hand of death removed him for ever on October 4, 1918. Bapa, however, had a unique opportunity to serve the poor and the depressed for thirtyfive long years. To the last, he was active, agile and devoted to the cause of service of the people, proving Srinivasa Sastri's misgivings about him to be entirely misplaced.

VI

Public Service

Bapa began his work as a member of the Servants of India Society with famine relief. Excessive winter rains and hail storms had created a fodder famine in Mathura in 1914. Bapa was sent there with another member, Krishna Das Chitalia.

Neither of the two had any previous experience of this kind of work. Bapa, however, had gathered some experience of relief work while he was the Chief Engineer in Porbandar. Then he had the example of his father to emulate. With this background, he organised relief and did a good job of it. His guidance proved useful to Chitalia as well.

Soon after completing his work at Mathura, Bapa returned to Bombay where he was to remain for another five years, working with Deodhar Dada for Harijan uplift. He was keen to learn from Gokhale but this was not to be. Gokhale died the next year on February 19, 1915. During these five years in Bombay, Bapa had to go out for brief periods on relief missions and his Mathura experience stood him in good stead.

In Bombay, Bapa devoted himself to ameliorating the working and living conditions of the conservancy employees. Their main problem was indebtedness. They had to pay some sixty to seventy rupees to municipal inspectors to secure a job carrying a salary of fifteen rupees. This money came from Pathan usurers and could never be repaid due to a very high rate of interest.

Bapa went into the details of the situation, collected all data and set up cooperative credit societies to help them. Since bribery prevalent in the municipality was the root cause of this indebtedness, Bapa fought against it relentlessly. The indifference of the authorities came in the way of any spectacular success, but Bapa went on campaigning perseveringly.

Bapa organised famine relief in Kutch in 1916. The next year, in cooperation with Deodhar and Joshi, he conducted an inquiry into the land revenue system in Kaira (Gujarat). He was also appointed secretary of the association of the non-official members of the Bombay Legislative Council the same year. Here he studied social and educational problems in depth and toured the country-side to collect data for the purpose. Communications were under-developed and the only transport available was often a bullock-cart or an *ekka* (horse cart). Roads were bad and his whole body ached after day-long journeys. But he was not the one to give up.

Bapa had an important role to play in the presentation of the bill on compulsory primary education in the Bombay Legislative Council. When the bill became an Act, he continued his efforts for its effective implementation. He wrote a number of articles for the English and language press stressing the need for compulsory primary education. He urged the local bodies in the presidency to implement the act and helped them in every way to do it.

In an issue of the *Servants of India* dated December 4, 1919, Bapa wrote an article on the subject in which he said: "According to my estimate, 80 per cent of men and 97 per cent of women, at the very least, are still illiterate. Of course, an Act has recently been passed on the subject but even where it has been enforced, its implementation is very limited. The State of Bombay was the first to have the enactment. There too only

two municipalities—one with a population of 1.1 lakhs and the other with only 22,000 residents—have enforced it so far, which shows that only 0.67 per cent of the State's population has been benefited. Primary education is as necessary for good Government and prosperity of the country as are the police and the army for its defence. It is no less important than railways, irrigation or communications”.

About this time the Tata Iron and Steel Company of Jamshedpur wrote to the Servants of India Society seeking a reliable person to organise labour welfare work there. Prices of essential commodities like foodgrains and cloth had soared after the First World War and workers in the plant found it difficult to manage within their wages. The company had decided to open fair price shops for its 25,000 employees at a cost of Rs.10 lakhs. It needed an efficient, experienced and reliable person to organise the system.

The Society chose Bapa for the job, and he went there in August 1918. He found that the wholesale dealers and middlemen were, in the main, responsible for the spurt in prices. He, therefore, prepared a scheme to eliminate the middlemen and to limit the profits of the trade. He prepared a list of commodities of daily use and bought them in bulk at the cheapest rates. He supplied them to retailers at a profit of five per cent and fixed a similar limit on the retail traders' profits. The wholesaler was eliminated and the workers began getting things at a much cheaper rate.

Bapa persuaded the Company to open its cloth shops. By coincidence there was a slump in the Indian textile industry and he took advantage of it to buy in bulk from Indian Mills particularly the Empress Mills at Nagpur. The workers began getting cloth for a rupee instead of the rupee and a half that they had to pay before.

Bapa did not limit his work to fair price shops alone. He studied other problems and sought their solutions as well. He had once told Sri Prakasa: "These children of the open fields, used to nature's sun and air, cannot stand the life of the factory which they take to for their livelihood and which thus saps their life itself". The company employed, besides foreigners and workmen from Punjab, Madras, Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, thousands of Kolas, Santhals and other Adivasis from nearby districts as labourers. A large number of them were women.

As with Harijans in Bombay, indebtedness was the main problem of the labourers in Jamshedpur. The Pathan moneylender of Bombay had reached here too and was living luxuriously at the cost of poor labourers. The rate of interest ranged between 75 and 150 per cent.

Bapa organised a dozen Cooperative Credit Societies for different categories of workers to stop this loot. These societies paid off the Pathans and took upon themselves the entire money lending business for the benefit of workers. Within a few months there was an improvement in the economic condition of the workers.

During the first five months at Jamshedpur, Bapa devoted himself to these problems. Then, when he had some breathing time, he formulated a number of schemes for the social welfare of workers. He enlisted the support of the Company's proprietors for these schemes. The next seven months saw a number of primary schools, sports clubs, children's parks and canteens coming up in Jamshedpur. He also drew up a scheme for airy and open quarters for the entire labour force working for the Company and initiated action for its implementation.

VII

Famine Relief Work

Scanty rains LED to scarcity conditions almost all over the country in 1918. In Panch Mahals (Bombay), the scarcity of food and fodder became very acute. Eighty per cent of the 1.25 lakh population of the district were Bhils. They had no means of subsistence beyond the agricultural produce. A large part of their land was already in the clutches of moneylenders which aggravated the already acute scarcity conditions. Most Bhils were reduced to mere skeletons in the absence of any sustenance. The Dahod and Jhalod talukas were the worst off. Some prominent social workers of Gujarat, including Indulal Yajnik, agitated through the press for declaration of the region as famine-stricken. The local officials, including the tehsildar, were however opposed to the demand. Taking advantage of scarcity and high prices, they were earning a lot through smuggling and black marketing of maize, jowar and other millets. They were also in league with zamindars, boot-leggers and traders who were openly exploiting the artless and simple Bhils. The land was being snatched away from them deceitfully, they were being compelled to *begar* (forced labour) and harassed in innumerable ways.

The situation gradually went from bad to worse, and public opinion grew so strong that the Government was forced to open test works to judge if the area was really famine-stricken. Bhils in their hundreds trekked long distances, sometimes up to seven miles, flocking to the test work sites to work there on six or seven paise a day. The authorities were rude and heartless towards

them. The workload was excessive and fines were imposed if there was even a little delay in reporting for work.

Sukhdeo Vishwanath Trivedi, who was a mechanic in the Public Works Department in the district, was in charge of one such work. He had great sympathy for this community whose hardships were partly man-made and partly due to natural calamities. Appalled at the inhuman behaviour of the officials, he did his best to help the Bhils and, simultaneously, exposed the misdeeds of the officials through the press and other media. As a consequence, he had to resign his job and leave the department.

But he would not give in. He continued to tour the area and send the news from there to the press. A Gujarat famine relief committee had, in the meantime, been set up in Bombay with Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas as its chairman. Indulal Yajnik was on the committee as a representative of Gujarat. Sukhdeobhai contacted him. The result was that the Governor was told about the famine conditions and corruption in the staff posted there. The corrupt officials were immediately transferred and the Governor undertook a tour of the district. He passed orders for speedy relief to the famine-stricken people.

Bapa was then engaged in labour welfare at Jamshedpur. He was on a visit to Bombay for the purchase of some building material for labour quarters. He had talks with members of the committee about the situation in Panch Mahals. Mahatma Gandhi had already written to him about it. The consensus was that Bapa should proceed to Panch Mahals as a special representative of the committee to study the situation and to streamline the relief organisation.

Bapa reached the district in March 1919 for the first time. He did not stop at collecting information from the authorities and the relief committee, but undertook a tour of the Dahod and Jhalod talukas on a bullock-cart. It took him eleven days to do

it and he visited eleven test work sites. Sukhdeobhai was with Bapa all through this difficult and tiring journey in the desolate region.

On his return to Bombay, Bapa submitted a detailed report on the situation in the Dahod-Jhalod region. He stressed the need for supplementing the official relief work with non-official efforts and also drew up a blue-print of how test works should be run. He persuaded a number of college students to proceed immediately to the famine area.

Bapa had to return to Jamshedpur as he had undertaken other responsibilities there and could not give much time to relief work in Gujarat. But he managed to wind up the work at Jamshedpur within a month and rushed back to Dahod. He undertook inspection of every centre and took over the conduct of the central office.

While devoting himself to the supervision of non-official relief work, he kept an alert eye on the official efforts. Wherever he found flaws, he criticised them. In a way, he was a non-official inspector of the official machinery. He played this role again and again on later occasions.

Bapa came across several instances of official callousness and arrogance and some of these shook him badly. One such instance was in the village of Shankarupura. Bapa was going from house to house distributing food and clothes during the 1922 famine. When he reached a hut, the woman who lived there closed the door and hid herself in a dark corner. Despite repeated requests she did not come out, nor would she speak a word. Bapa was surprised. He said very loudly: "Why do you not come out, sister? We are from the relief committee. Do you need some clothes or food?"

She said something in Bhili and Sukhdeobhai interpreted it: "I need all help, but how can I come out? I have no clothes to

cover myself and am using the hut as the only cover I can have". Bapa was aghast. He threw some clothes inside the hut. Then alone the middle aged skeleton of a woman could come out. Such instances convinced Bapa that one should not depend solely on the Government and its officials for famine relief work and that public institutions should invariably undertake this work on their own.

Bapa had a similar call from Orissa. The Kushman, a tributary of the Mahanadi, was in spate and had inundated an area of 150 square miles in the district of Puri, destroying the early paddy crop entirely. Whatever subsistence was available was robbed by untimely November rains which damaged the Kharif crop. Rice prices soared high and people began to starve.

On instructions from the Servants of India Society and Mahatma Gandhi, Bapa went to Puri on April 27, 1920 to organise relief. After an intensive tour of the affected region, he sent a detailed report on the situation which was published in the *Servants of India*.

According to Bapa's report, about 1.5 lakh people in 400 villages in an area of 250 square miles had been affected by floods. A very large number of them were starving. While touring the area, Bapa estimated that 1,500 persons had died of hunger. Later, he admitted that the number could not have been less than 3,000.

Bapa came across the same remorseless callousness in the officials in Puri which he had encountered in the Dahod-Jhalod talukas of the Panch Mahals. When Gopabandhu Das described the heart-rending scenes of suffering in the Orissa Assembly, the Commissioner tried to minimise the gravity of the situation by saying that the report was exaggerated. Those days, the outlook of the officials was diametrically opposed to that of the national leaders. Wherever Bapa organised relief work, he had to come

in conflict with the official machinery. But he did his duty fearlessly. Whenever he found shortcomings in the official arrangements, he criticised even the highest in officialdom boldly and severely.

Even where the Government officials were neglecting the problem and refusing to admit famine conditions, public bodies were alive to the situation and were doing their bit. The Puri famine relief committee had been set up. The district Superintendent of Police, Rai Bahadur Sakhichand, had, through a personal donation, started a scheme of free distribution of rice and had set up an orphanage and hospital. The Hindi Natya Samaj of Calcutta had also come forward to provide succour to the suffering people.

These efforts and the pressure of public opinion forced the official machinery to stir itself. The Lieutenant Governor went on a tour of the famine hit area on April 7 and governmental relief operations were started. Six relief centres were opened where in all 5000 people were given free rice and cooked food. This was thoroughly inadequate compared with the magnitude of the problem. In the first place, the quantum of ration was low; secondly, there were thrice as many people who needed this kind of support. Bapa felt: "In order that every able-bodied person is provided with means of livelihood, test works should be opened, not merely in some centrally located villages, but in every village. Along with this, non-official bodies and individuals must come forward to provide all possible financial and other help. It is a disgraceful sight to see a woman of forty or fifty dressed in rags, reaching only upto her knee, or a girl of twelve or fourteen dressed in a mere *langotee*."

On Bapa's appeal, a number of philanthropists of Calcutta and Bombay sent liberal donations for this sacred purpose and helped in saving many lives.

Mahatma Gandhi was very much impressed by the relief operations organised by Bapa in Orissa. Bapa used to send him regular reports of the work done. When the Society's President, Srinivasa Sastri proposed to send Bapa to British Guiana to help Indian settlers there, Gandhiji opposed it. He wrote to Sastri that any third rate man could go to British Guiana but no one could efficiently replace Bapa in Orissa.

On Bapa's insistence, Mahatma Gandhi visited Puri to see things for himself. An idea of what he saw can be had from the following: "I went to Jagannath Puri in 1921. Much of what I saw there cannot be easily forgotten... Here, under the shadow of the Jagannath temple itself, were seated in files people in an area of twelve miles. Many of them owed their life to the magnanimity of Gujaratis and to Amritlal Thakkar who collected funds from Gujaratis and distributed rice purchased with this money. The flame of life was getting dimmer in them. One could count all their ribs. Their veins stood out prominently. They were all bones and wrinkled skin. The death wish seemed to pervade all the faces. It seemed as though they had no interest left in life and the world except the fistful of rice they got. This was the most pitiable scene in all my experience".

A welcome consequence of Bapa's visit to Orissa, besides the immediate relief to the famine-stricken people, was the beginning of an organised public life in the State. It was through Bapa's efforts that leaders like Hare Krushna Mahatab, Nabakrishna Chowdhury and Gopabandhu Das came forward to take up politics. This is why he is sometimes called the father of modern Orissa.

The year of 1943-44 again brought great calamity to the country. A terrible famine engulfed Bengal, Orissa, parts of Ajmer, Mewar, the Bijapur district of Bombay, Malabar and some talukas of Travancore-Cochin. In Bengal alone, the famine took a toll of about thirtyfive lakh lives.

It was an acid test for Bapa. Mahatma Gandhi and almost all the great leaders of the country were behind bars as a consequence of the Quit India Movement. The alien rulers had no sympathy for the people in their hour of tribulation. In any case, the British Government itself was engaged in a life or death struggle in the second world war. It would be more correct to say that in some Parts of The Country, notably Bengal, the root cause of famine was the wrong policies of the Government itself. It was impossible for Bapa to sit idle at such a time. Today he would be in Bengal, tomorrow in Bijapur and in Malabar the third day. Wherever there was pain, misery and hunger, Bapa was there to assuage the suffering. Even when he was in a distant place like Delhi, he would not forget his obligation to the famine-stricken people. A former Education Minister of Bombay, Dinkar Desai, who was engaged in relief work in Bijapur with Bapa, wrote: "I have seen him often working continuously for nearly twenty hours a day without adequate rest or sleep. And this was at the ripe old age of seventy four".

Drought for three consecutive years had reduced the people of Bijapur to utter penury. A committee set up in Bombay under Bapa to organise relief collected more than Rs. 8 lakhs and fed, on a monthly average, 8000 people at the free kitchens. With a view to helping respectable families, who would not seek employment on relief works or who would not attend free kitchens, relief was given in grain-doles. The committee also distributed 1,10,000 garments to 84,000 persons. Yarn was secured from textile mills and distributed among weavers to provide them with work. The spinning wheel was also popularised.

The committee set up 51 cattle feeding centres and cattle camps in important villages. Cultivators were encouraged and subsidised to grow green fodder. Several newspapers praised the well organized relief operations conducted by the committee. Bapa was very careful about every detail regarding relief

measures. His inquiries were not confined either to one village or a single centre. He would tour the entire affected area and verify his information by personal inspection. He was never satisfied by a general statements, but always wanted accurate statistical date.

Government officials neglecting their obligations to the famine-affected people were not spared by Bapa here either. Through newspapers and other media, he exposed and criticised such lapses ruthlessly. Based on a statement by Bapa, the *Bombay Sentinel* wrote in one of its editorials: "Mismanagement, maladministration and neglect of this type have damaged the prestige of the Government.... By wholesale and immediate removal of those administering the district alone can the Government save face. In any other country such a situation would not be tolerated for a moment".

The tragedy of Bengal and Orissa had its beginning on October 16, 1942, when a terrific cyclone hit Midnapur, particularly its Contai Pargana, and the coastal districts of Cuttack and Baleshwar in Orissa. It left in its wake a trail of destruction more severe in its intensity than the earthquakes of Bihar and Quetta. In Midnapur alone, the entire paddy crop in a fifty mile long and six mile wide belt was destroyed and the monstrous waves, caused by the hurricane, devoured 40,000 human beings and lakhs of cattle.

The result was a terrible scarcity of food, water and clothes. Rice which was selling at Rs. 3.5 a maund before the cyclone now cost Rs. 7.5 a maund. This was the time when the British Government was fighting for its very existence. Japan, whose empire in East Asia had expanded at a terrific speed, was knocking at the eastern frontiers of India. In the country itself, terrified by the great response to the Quit India movement, the Government had jailed all the important leaders of the nation. Following a negative policy to wreak vengeance on the people, it started a large scale purchase of rice in Bengal. Prices rose

continuously and reached the Rs. 80 a maund mark; in some parts of eastern Bengal it sold at Rs. 100 a maund. It was beyond the reach not only of the poor but also of the middle classes. Famine was there in all its grimness and in the towns, thousands began to die daily on the streets. Bapa was the only non-Bengali who had rushed to Midnapur, undaunted by the bureaucratic terror, to provide relief.

Speaking at a public meeting in Delhi, after his tour of the famine-stricken parts of Bengal and Orissa, Bapa said: "What Bengal suffers today cannot be imagined without personally seeing it. Any number of villages are desolate with no trace of human beings. Leaving their hearths and homes, thousands have trudged down to towns. Children have lost their parents, women their husbands. Everyone is interested solely in finding something to quell the pangs of hunger. They wander lost. They are mere skeletons. Women have no clothes to cover themselves. Children scour the drains and pounce upon pieces of vegetables and peels of fruit. Dead bodies rot on the roads and in market places and there is none to dispose of them. They are food for dogs and vultures. Dying children are dragged away by dogs even before they breathe their last".

No wonder that parents sold their children for a couple of rupees and women sold their bodies and honour to save themselves from starvation. Bapa was there from April 1943 to August 1944, devoting all his energy to relief work.

Orissa was no better. It was a smaller version of Bengal, but no less grim. Hunger stalked the land. Villages and towns on the sea coast were strewn with dead bodies. In many villages, there were mounds of skeletons and skulls. Before the attention of the authorities had been drawn to the situation, 25,000 men, women and children had gone into the jaws of death. Two hundred had perished in Ganjam alone. How could Bapa keep

away from his beloved Orissa? The grinding poverty of the people there had made a lifelong impression on him.

An Orissa Famine Relief Committee was set up under Bapa. He toured the state twice during 1943-44 and organised relief operations. Indefatigably, he devoted all his time and energy to this. Food and clothes worth lakhs of rupees were distributed. Bapa himself became guardian to numerous orphans and widows.

Bapa wept at the plight of his dear people—long queues of women and children reduced to mere skeletons. He had extremely tender feelings for the people of Orissa and their suffering was too much for him to bear. His punctuality, zeal and regularity at his advanced age put even his young co-workers to shame.

He was extremely busy in Bijapur, Bengal and Orissa and yet he found time to attend to the needs of the Malabar, Bellary, Anantpur and Kurnool districts of Madras which were in similar throes of scarcity. He was in constant touch with the situation and relief operations there and, whenever he found it necessary, went there to supervise the work. He could not visit Ajmer-Mewar but he obtained all information from there and made appeals for help and donations,

VIII

Service to the Aborigines

All the poor and the depressed people were dear to Bapa and they received his sympathy and services, but Harijans and Adivasis always claimed the greatest attention. They were his first love and his longing to serve them was limitless.

A beginning in this field had been made in the Panch Mahals (Gujarat) with the Bhils, but later, all the aborigines in the country were included in his mission of service. Later still, he established the Adim Jati Seva Sangh which was headed by the first President of independent India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

Bapa had his first contact with the Bhils when he organised famine relief in the Dahod and Jhalod talukas of Panch Mahals in 1919 and 1922. He made a close study of their social life and economic conditions. Living close to them and seeing their life and customs dispelled many of the prevalent misconceptions about Bhils. There was a general belief that Bhils were uncivilised and cruel, that they had no morals, that they either hid themselves away from civilised people or killed them with their bows and arrows. What Bapa found was the exact opposite. He found the Bhils to be simple, superstitious people who were mercilessly exploited because of their ignorance and timidity by petty government officials, moneylenders, landlords and black magic priests. No doubt they were prey to some evil habits. None of their religious or social functions could be conducted or completed without liquor. The use of liquor was inevitable at birth, marriage, illness and death; it was a necessary ingredient of hospitality. This resulted in perpetual indebtedness.

Repayment of loans, incurred once, continued generation after generation. Then hunger drove the Bhils to theft and the police caught them and beat them up. They were in constant terror, not only of the police and petty officials, but also of upper class people. They lived in abject fear of law. Their position was that of serfs, their life a humiliating experience. People looked down upon them.

Bapa reached their huts and tried to win them with love and sympathy. He found that though some people were there to entice them for religious conversion, there was none to render selfless, disinterested service. He felt that this extremely poor and superstitious but brave community stood in need of immediate help, otherwise utter ruin stared it in the face.

Bapa decided to set up a permanent organisation for the service of the Bhil community. His dream was realised with a small ashram in Bhirakheri, where a Brahmin couple taught Bhil children the three rs, and told them tales from the *Ramayana* in the evenings.

Bapa prepared a scheme for this organisation and publicised it in the press. He needed a dozen young men inspired by the ideal of service who would be prepared to serve the community with all their capacity for a period of at least three years on a small subsistence allowance of Rs. 30 to Rs. 50 a month. They should not only undertake to teach children, but help the community in improving its agriculture, save the Bhils from the clutches of usurious moneylenders and protect them from the atrocities of Government officials.

Bapa proposed the setting up of cooperative credit societies and cottage industries like spinning and weaving. The scheme envisaged the gradual removal of evil social customs and superstitious beliefs and the establishment of a dispensary. It was suggested that ten centres should be established to serve the

community and two ashrams should be opened for children. He had estimated that all this should involve an expenditure of Rs. 52,000 in three years. He hoped that this amount would be available from public donations.

Half a dozen young men came forward to take up this work, prominent among them being Sukhdeobhai whom Bapa had known since 1919. Bapa wrote of him: "Sukhdeo Vishwanath Trivedi, generally known as Sukhdeo Kaka, is the father engaged in the service of the Bhils and I the mother."

Dahyabhai Nayak, a graduate of Gujarat Vidyapeeth, was also among these volunteers. Under Indulal Yajnik's inspiration, he had opened an ashram at Bhirakheri and was engaged with Sukhdeobhai, in teaching Bhil children. Later, writing about Nayak, Bapa said: "He is the only person with a penchant for public service who has the responsibility of a family on his shoulders, worries about marrying off his daughters and financing his sons' education. Widower and single as I am, I cannot even understand his problems and position. The period of his vow to serve the adivasis for twenty years is over, but he is still engrossed in the service of the Bhils. During the past ten years, he has set up a number of cooperative marketing societies and a cooperative bank."

Many other public-spirited young men came to Bapa to take up this work. He met Lakshmidas Shrikant in Bombay who introduced him to his friend, Pandurang Vanikar. Vanikar joined the scheme and later Shrikant also came with his wife from Bombay to settle down in Panch Mahals. Ishwar Lal Vaidya, Roopajibhai Parmar, Maganlal Mehta and some others also joined in the work.

Bapa was happy. He had found the type of young men he required for his scheme. On November 5, 1922, the famine relief office at Dahod became the office of the Bhil Seva Mandal.

Centres were opened at Garwada, Jaisawada, Gultora, Murabera and other villages as enthusiastic young men joined the Mandal. Each worker was put in charge of a centre. These workers ran schools, helped the poor with food and clothes and distributed medicines, propagated temperance and related religious tales. A weavers' cooperative was started at Garwada and a boarding house was set up with the school in Jethawada. Four schools, a hostel, a dispensary, and many cooperative societies were established within six months.

But even this innocent service had its risks. Local officials and traders had not objected to Bapa's efforts in organising relief during the famine but now they felt that the way Bapa and his colleagues were penetrating the Bhil community might act as a check on their exploitation of Bhils. The ashrams were anathema to them. They felt that their vested interests were in jeopardy. If the Bhils were educated and their ignorance was removed, forced labour and bribes, usurious rates of interest and inordinately high prices would all become things of the past and the Bhils would not be intimidated into submission. So the Mandal was obstructed in its activities on every step. It became difficult to obtain land for building a school or a house. Those who were bold enough to permit the ashram workers to stay with them were harassed and it became extremely difficult for the workers to find a shelter. Patwaris uprooted the huts they put up for themselves. False court cases were instituted against them to involve them in lengthy litigation, resulting in extreme harassment for months. But the workers did not lose heart, they put up with all this with a smile and faced all the obstacles with courage and determination.

Maganlalbhai Mehta had to start his school under a tree. Later, he shifted it to the verandahs of government buildings and a shed attached to the shop of a blacksmith who became his devotee.

Roopaji Parmar's school was under a banyan tree. One day, while he was sleeping under the tree behind a mat, a tiger came by roaring loudly. This did not deter Roopaji from running the school there.

To get Bhil children interested in studies and to sustain their interest was a problem in itself. The Mandal workers used all their persuasion and energy on the Bhils to send their boys to the schools or the ashrams, but their enthusiasm for education would waver after a few days. It was more difficult for boys to live in the ashrams where they felt like caged birds; they would slip off to their huts at the slightest opportunity.

Those selfish people who stood to lose through the spread of literacy did their utmost to dissuade the Bhils from sending their children to school. Nobody fed, clothed and educated others' children for nothing, they argued; there was surely some selfish motive behind it-; Bhils should heed the warning and refuse to send their children to the Mandal schools. And this too had some effect on the Bhil mind. Government officials were suspicious of the Mandal activities from the beginning. They apprehended trouble of the same type that had been whipped up by Gobind Guru, back in 1913-14 in Banswara.

Govind Guru was the religious leader of the Banswara Bhils. He initiated a religious movement there by giving them an amulet to wear round their necks in the name of the Goddess Bhagwati and persuaded them to give up liquor and non-vegetarianism. Gradually politics entered the movement. The political agent asked a crowd of thousands of Bhils, who had gathered at the Mangarh Hill, to disperse. The police fired in the air to scare the Bhils away when they refused to obey the order. Since there were no casualties the Bhils thought the Guru had some supernatural powers which rendered the enemy bullets ineffective. This caught the Bhil fancy and spread like wild fire

resulting in bigger crowds gathering to see and hear the Guru. Next time, the army shot to kill and hundreds of Bhils died on the spot. Govind Guru was arrested and imprisoned for years. After his release, he joined the Mandal. This naturally led to apprehensions in the official mind. The authorities were asked to be alert and to take all precautions.

The Bhil Seva Mandal also suffered from financial difficulties. Whatever donations were received through Bapa's efforts were not enough to meet the expenses. During 1925, the expenditure was over Rs 17,000 while the total receipts were only about Rs 15,000.

But Bapa was not worried. He believed that financial difficulties were a necessary part of the training for public workers. With Dahod as the centre, Bapa expanded the Mandal's activities over the entire area, working with faith and devotion for ten years to ensure that the Mandal took root. As its President, he guided all the Mandal activities.

He had set up a common mess for all the workers in Dahod. He laid great stress on common messing and the practice was introduced in all the centres and ashrams. He wanted the teachers and students to eat together and partake of the same food. Once a cook who was unaware of Bapa's principles put more ghee in his plate. Bapa exchanged it with a Bhil boy sitting by his side. The cook pointed out that Bapa was eating off the wrong plate and Bapa calmly said: "It does not matter. My plate has more ghee on it, is that all? But I am old and cannot digest all that rich food while younger people can."

Bapa liked to travel and could not be tied down to a place for long. He stayed at Dahod for hardly ten days in a month, spending most of the time visiting various centres. A small bullock cart was his conveyance and Sukhdeobhai a constant companion. But he preferred to walk.

He considered cleanliness more important than education. If he found some piece of paper or twigs lying about in the centres he visited, he would pick them up and put them in the refuse bin himself. Personal cleanliness of the students, as also of their clothes, was a necessary part of his inspections.

Bapa stressed punctuality and regularity and tried his best to stick to programmes drawn up earlier. He was once on an inspection tour at Jambua. He was staying there for the night and proceeding to Garbada, five miles away the next morning. It began to rain heavily in the evening and the downpour continued the entire next morning. Workers tried to persuade him to extend his stay there at Jambua for a day. But Bapa would not be detained. At the appointed time, he left Jambua, without even an umbrella. There was a river on the way which was in spate and it was very difficult to cross it, but he managed it and reached Garbada at 1 p.m.

The Jhalod Ashram was opened on November 21, 1923, and Lakshmidas Shrikant, Congress worker from Bombay, was given charge of it. He came from his palatial residence in Bombay and settled down in a brewer's hut. One can imagine what it meant to him to serve the people. Vir Singh and Vyas later joined him at Jhalod.

The two talukas of Dahod and Jhalod were completely covered by the activities of the Mandal within three years. Four ashrams and eight schools were set up. The Gujarat Congress Committee also handed over the centre at Mirakheri, which it had been running, to the Mandal. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel presided over the annual function of the Mirakheri centre on May 8, 1925.

Then, one day Bapa decided to study the condition of other Adivasi communities in the country, as the Mandal's work had now achieved some order. He devoted the first four months of 1926 to a tour of Raipur and Mandal in the Central Provinces, the

Santhal Parganas of Bihar and Bengal and the hill districts of Assam. He made a deep study of their social and economic problems, their customs and the problem of conversions. On his return, he contributed two articles to the *Navajivan*, drawing attention to the neglect of aborigines in these regions.

Commenting on these articles, Mahatma Gandhi wrote “Brother Amritlal Thakkar does not don the yellow robes of a sanyasi (who renounces the worldly pleasures and pursuits) but he has enriched and adorned the institution of sanyasis. He does not describe himself as a sanyasi but all his work pertains to that institution. He is old but does not rest, nor does he let those around him rest. And who can relax when misery like a wild fire engulfs the people? Perhaps some lazy useless fellow. Brother Amritlal is already a Guru of Harijans and now he is striving to be a guru of the hill tribes as well.”

From the very beginning of this work, Bapa was of the opinion that along with education, a sense of religious tradition must be inculcated in the Bhils to enable them to lead a virtuous life. The *Ramayana* was popularised in the schools and ashrams. And who could be a more appropriate god for the Bhils than Rama who had taken plums eaten earlier by a Bhil woman to ensure that they were sweet. But Bhils could not easily understand the Tulsidas version and, on Bapa’s persuasion, Maganlalbhai Menta prepared a Bhil translation of it which was set to music by Dattoobhai Barlokar. This proved very popular among the Bhils.

Bapa now wanted a temple of Rama to be constructed there and under Vanikar’s supervision, its construction was taken up at Jesawara. On April 21, 1926, the Rama Navami Day, the Shankaracharya Bharati Krishna Tirtha of Jagannath Puri hoisted the flag on the temple and the idol of Rama was installed there. The Shankaracharya Shrikurtakoti presided over a similar function at the Jhalod temple on the next Rama Navami Day.

Kishorelal Mashruwala was also present on the occasion. Thousands of enthusiastic Bhils gathered at the temple on both the occasions.

The work of the Mandal relating to temperance and cooperatives also met with great success. The Bhils had been given education and a sense of clean, virtuous living. Efforts were made to rid them of their indebtedness, their expenses on liquor were brought down and they were attracted towards a religious outlook. The seed sown three years ago had grown into a huge tree.

Bapa was emboldened to extend and intensify the activities of the Mandal. The young volunteers had taken a vow to serve the Bhil community for three years. When the period was over, Bapa inspired them to renew the pledge for a twenty-year period. On the morning of February 22, 1927, Bapa was the first to take the pledge at the Jesawara Rama temple. He then administered it to seven others, Sukhdeobhai, Panduranga Vanikar, Dahyabhai Nayak, Mangaldas Arya, Ambalal Vyas, Roopaji Parmar and Ishwarlal Vaidya. The pledge was as follows:

On this auspicious morning, in front of Rama, I pledge myself to this service, with body, soul and word:

1. I shall devote all my intelligence and energy to the social uplift of my Bhil brethren and their backward branches.
2. I shall be satisfied with whatever arrangements the Mandal makes for my own and by family's upkeep and shall not take any personal or selfish advantage of the task of serving the Bhils.
3. For twenty years from April 1, 1923, I shall serve the Bhil brethren.
4. I shall lead a life of purity in word, deed and spirit.

5. As far as possible, I shall not involve myself in any feud or dispute. I shall honestly observe all the rules laid down by the Mandal and shall strive for the fulfilment of the Mandal's aims and objects.
6. Along with the service to the Bhil community, I shall serve other communities of "untouchables" like Dhedas, Bhangis, Dabgars, and Chamars and shall strive for their social uplift.
7. For the present, I shall live in Dahod or Jhalod to which the activities of the Mandal are limited, but if called upon by the Mandal to serve the Bhils elsewhere, I shall go there.

Bapa enjoined them to be faithful to the pledge even if it meant death.

Bapa stayed at Dahod for a decade, carrying on the Mandal's work. Then, in 1932-33, the struggle for independence was launched and many of the Mandal's workers sought Bapa's permission to join the movement. The atmosphere in the country was surcharged with the spirit of independence and Bapa released them from the pledge to enable them to plunge into the struggle. He himself shouldered all their responsibilities to the Mandal.

Bapa had not directly joined the movement but he had deep sympathy with the cause and those who were in the struggle. He raised his voice against the police atrocities on unarmed, peaceful satyagrahis. The police was naturally annoyed with him. He was arrested in Ahmedabad when he was witnessing the police torture of the volunteers picketing liquor shops. He was charged with obstructing the police in the discharge of official duties. For two weeks he was kept in the police lock-up and harassed there. Then a magistrate sentenced him to imprisonment for six months and sent him to the Sabarmati

Jail. On appeal, the magisterial order was quashed and Bapa was released after a month and a quarter.

On his return, Bapa found that most of the Mandal workers had been arrested. He completely reorganised the Mandal activities and decentralised the authority and responsibility of the various organisations it had set up.

In 1932 itself, at Gandhiji's behest, Bapa had to shoulder the responsibility of the Harijan Sevak Sangh's secretaryship and he proceeded to Delhi from Dahod. He, however, did not neglect the Mandal's work even while he was in Delhi. Its activities had a quick expansion, financial difficulties had also been overcome. The Chief Minister of Bombay, Bala Sahib Kher, and other leaders including Morarji Desai and Vaikuntha Lal Mehta visited the various organisations of the Mandal and encouraged the workers to continue the good work being done there.

Now, Bapa extended the activities of the Mandal to other aborigines in different provinces. Sukhdeobhai was deputed to serve the Adivasis in Rajasthan. The services of Vanikar and Vyas were lent to the Governments of the Central Provinces and Orissa respectively. These experienced workers initiated the Adivasi uplift work in these states.

Bapa's attachment to Dahod continued till the last. His last visit was on September 23, 1949, when he met his dear Bhil brethren. In a public meeting at Jhalod he said with a heavy heart:

“Our Gandhi Bapu has left us. My days too are numbered. But the work being done here is Bapu's; this is not to be forgotten. We have attained independence, but its defence is our responsibility. There are many communities like the Bhils in this country—Santhals, Gonds, Jawangs, Hoes, Mundas

and others. You should take up the type of work being done in Panch Mahals in other tribal communities. It is everybody's duty today to be selfless. The country wants us to be altruistic."

He laid the foundation stone of the Dahod Municipal building during this trip. He said on this occasion:

"The country has 25 million Adivasis and 50 million Harijans. These 75 million people cannot be neglected if India wants to defend its independence, honour and glory. It will require stupendous efforts to bring them to the same standard as the rest of the population."

Gopinath Bardoloi, a former Chief Minister of Assam, had rightly pointed out that Bapa's love for the tribals was not confined to those only in the plains. He was appointed a member of the advisory sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly formed to enquire into and report on the political, social and economic set up for the hill-people of Assam under the new constitution. His love for the hill people can easily be imagined when one remembers that he undertook a journey to the Lushai hills in summer, a period when the region is almost inaccessible. His anxiety for the Lushais' welfare can be seen from the report he signed. He did not rest content till he could prevail upon the constitution-makers and the Government of India to make the welfare of the tribals a charge on the Consolidated Fund of India.

As Ambalal Vyas puts it, Bapa was the first Hindu missionary to start welfare work among the Adivasis. The work he began continues, and workers trained by him carry on the mission among the Adivasis in various parts of India.

IX

Harijan Welfare

Bapa had revolted against untouchability even as a child. His heart felt compassion for those who were called *Antyajias* in Gujarat, those days made it hard for him to bear their humiliation. On entering public life, he spearheaded a movement against the practice of untouchability and helped Harijans wherever he got an opportunity to do so. He considered Shinde, who founded the Depressed Classes Mission, his guru because he had learnt the lesson of serving the untouchable communities from him. His attachment with Harijans is illustrated by an episode about which Mahatma Gandhi wrote in his autobiography under the title “A Test”.

“Only a few months after the establishment of the Kocharab Ashram in Ahmedabad, we had to undergo a totally unexpected test. We received a letter from brother Amritlal Thakkar informing us that a poor *Antyaja* family wished to live in the Ashram, would we keep them?

I was taken aback by the letter. I had not hoped that any *Antyaja* family would come to us so soon with a recommendation from a man like Thakkar Bapa. I showed the letter to my colleagues and they welcomed the idea. I wrote back to Amritlalbhai that we would be willing to admit the family to the Ashram provided it observed the Ashram rules.

Dudhabhai, his wife Dani and their infant child, Lakshmi, all arrived in the Ashram. Dudhabhai was a teacher in Bombay. He was willing to abide by the Ashram rules and was admitted.

This caused a furore in the circle of friends and helpers. Difficulty was experienced in drawing water for the Ashram from the well which was partly owned by the proprietor of the bungalow where the Ashram was located. Even the man who was engaged to draw water felt defiled if a few drops of it fell on him. He began to abuse us. He harassed Dudhabhai. I had told everybody that we should put up with all the abuses and keep drawing water from that well with determination. This put him to shame and he let us be. But financial assistance to the Ashram was stopped. Friends who had objected to the entry of any untouchable into the Ashram even if he observed all the rules could not even imagine that any *Antyaja* would be admitted there. Some rumours of our being ostracised also reached me. I told my colleagues that even if we were ostracised and did not receive any financial assistance, we should not leave Ahmedabad. We would settle down in same locality where the untouchables lived and would live on whatever we received, or would work as labourers to meet our expenses.”

Under Mahatma Gandhi’s inspiration, Mama Sahib Phadke had set up an Ashram for the welfare of the untouchables at Godhara, the first in Gujarat. Bapa encouraged him and gave him substantial assistance. About the same time, the idea of setting up the Gujarat Antyaja Seva Mandal for the welfare of Harijans was born. An Ashram for Harijan children was opened at Nadiad and

three or four schools were also established for them. Indulal Yajnik was behind this work as the secretary of the Mandal.

The Mandal was formally launched in 1923 and Bapa was elected its President. Some workers took a pledge to serve the cause as life members of the Mandal, as had been done in the case of the Bhil Seva Mandal. The Mandal did good work for a decade. Parikshitlal Majumdar was appointed as its Secretary in 1924 and he accompanied Bapa wherever he went in Gujarat in connection with the Harijan welfare work. As Bapa's favourite disciple, he had adopted all his virtues. The Mandal did excellent work in Gujarat and opened two ashrams and thirty schools for Harijans. Harijan welfare in those days was a more difficult task than Adivasi welfare. But Bapa and his determined colleagues went on with it undeterred.

July 1927 brought excessive rains to Gujarat which resulted in floods. Parts of Gholka, Dhundhuka, Anand and Baroda and many other states were waterlogged. Touring these areas, Bapa found that a large number of wells in the villages, specially those used by *Antyajias* had been flooded and damaged. Since these people could not draw water from the wells belonging to caste Hindus, they were compelled to drink dirty water from ponds and tanks. On Bapa's insistence, the flood relief committee set apart a sum of Rs. 50,000 for sinking wells for untouchables. The money was handed over to Bapa who got 130 wells dug for Harijans.

Bapa was sympathetic, even partial, towards Bhangis. Finding that their most acute problem was that of having inadequate drinking water in many areas, Bapa got them 200 new wells in five years and got wells repaired and renovated.

From 1932, when he was appointed Secretary of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, till he breathed his last, Bapa served the Harijans with singular, unrivalled, exemplary devotion. None else

could shoulder the great responsibility. When Mahatma Gandhi asked Ghanshyam Das Birla to become the President of the Anti-Untouchability League, which was later converted into the Harijan Sevak Sangh, he agreed on condition that Bapa was made the Sangh's secretary. Mahatma Gandhi too had his eye on Bapa. And Bapa proceeded to Delhi immediately even though he had the responsibility of the Bhil Seva Mandal. It will be appropriate here to refer to Mahatma Gandhi's historic fast in Yervada jail which led to the Poona Pact of September 1932 and the establishment of the League.

When after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, Mahatma Gandhi went to London as the sole representative of the Congress to participate in the Round Table Conference in 1931, he firmly told the British authorities that he would stake his life against any move to give the untouchables separate electoral rights. He was not taken seriously and his statement was construed as a mere threat. And the unexpected happened. The untouchables were given a separate electorate in the Communal Award. Gandhiji was then in the Yervada jail. He wrote to the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, and the Secretary of State for India, Samuel Hoare, to rescind the decision which created a schism in the Hindu society. It was to no avail. As a last resort, he decided to fast unto death and informed the authorities accordingly. The fast began on September 20. The news shook the country like an earthquake. Those who believed in untouchability woke to the realisation that they would have to offer penance for the great sin they and their forefathers had perpetrated. Leaders of Harijans and caste Hindus reached Poona to find a solution which would nullify the separate electorate and satisfy Mahatma Gandhi so that he could give up his fast. Dr. Ambedkar had lost faith in caste Hindus. Madan Mohan Malaviya who had great affection for Gandhiji was unable to find a solution that would satisfy both parties. With

great statesmanship, Tej Bahadur Sapru worked out a scheme, for which Dr. Ambedkar expressed his gratitude. According to the Simon Commission's report, the untouchables were to get 131 seats in the provincial legislative assemblies, but Sapru raised the number of reserved seats to 148. Dr. Ambedkar was persuaded to accept the formula and an agreement was reached. The British Prime Minister deleted that part of the Award which had conferred separate electoral rights on the untouchables. Mahatma Gandhi gave up the fast.

Immediately after the commencement of the fast, Bapa had left Dahod for Poona and met Mahatma Gandhi in the jail. He played an important role in presenting Mahatma Gandhi's point of view before the all-party conference in Bombay. He was an acknowledged master of facts and figures. With great perseverance, he worked out the proportion of the Hindu population in different provinces and the percentages of the untouchables in this population. He spent many sleepless nights on the collection of correct data and figures from the reports of the Lothian Commission and the Simon Commission and census reports. His articles entitled "What they have gained" reveals his deep study of the problem. Bapa wrote:

"That Mahatma Gandhi's life could be saved is enough justification for the Poona Pact. But even if the facts that this historic fast had forged a new unity between the so-called caste Hindus and untouchables and that the British Prime Minister was forced to change his decision are not taken into consideration, the moral value of this agreement cannot be under-estimated. The Poona Pact has shown to Britain and the world at large that social consciousness and cultural oneness are still present in Hinduism."

The Poona Pact was in itself historic. Any agreement signed by Harijan leaders like Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, R. Srinivasan, M. C. Raja and P. N. Rajbhoj on the one hand and caste Hindus like Madan Mohan Malaviya, Tej Bahadur Sapru, M. R. Jayakar, C. Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad and Ghanshyam Das Birla on the other could not but be historic. Because of the Pact, September 24 came to be known as the Harijan Day.

A huge public meeting of Hindus was held in Bombay on September 30 under Madan Mohan Malaviya. The meeting expressed its gratitude to God through whose grace Mahatma Gandhi's life could be saved. Leaders of the caste Hindus and untouchables were also thanked for their cooperative spirit during the negotiations which led to the signing of the Pact.

The meeting, through a resolution, decided to set up the All India Anti Untouchability League to carry on vigorous propaganda against untouchability. The head office of the League was to be in Delhi with branches all over the country. Ghanshyam Das Birla was appointed President and Amritlal Vitthaldas Thakkar Secretary of the League. Later, when Mahatma Gandhi adopted the word "Harijan" for untouchables, the name of the League was also changed into Harijan Sevak Sangh.

Bapa entrusted the responsibility of the Bhil Seva Mandal to his trusted and experienced workers and left Dahod for Delhi. It was not easy for him to wrench himself away from the Mandal workers, on the other hand, the cause of the Harijans was no less dear to him. Service of the Bhils was life's mission, but Mahatma Gandhi succeeded in persuading him to leave it. In his appeal to Bapa, he said: "At this hour in the history of country and Hindu society, Harijan welfare is more important. Harijan work has a deeply spiritual implication leading to the cleansing and regeneration of the nation. It is a penance that has to be performed by every Hindu heart for our treatment of the untouchables. This can be

achieved through the efforts of men with high moral force. The Hindu community which sinned for centuries by observing untouchability has to undergo the penance. Only men like you, Bapa, can initiate this work.”

Bapa devoted himself to the work of the Harijan Sevak Sangh with high missionary zeal and dedication. The work itself was not new to him. A foundation had already been laid. With determination, he set out on a tour of the country to understand the position of Harijans in different provinces and to build a powerful campaign against the practice of untouchability. This was a whirlwind tour. Within a few months he had established branches of the Sangh in every province and picked up a large number of dedicated workers.

There was an apprehension that the awakening of the Hindu society achieved through Mahatma Gandhi's epoch-making fast might again lapse into a torpor. Mahatma Gandhi undertook another 21-day fast on May 8, 1933 for the purification of the workers and the inculcation in them of the true spirit of atonement. The anti-untouchability campaign gained impetus through this fast.

As the epic fast of the Mahatma came to a successful conclusion, Bapa devoted himself to the work with renewed zeal and enthusiasm. While on a tour, the idea came to his mind one day that the work would get a powerful fillip and gather momentum, if Mahatma Gandhi were to tour the entire country for Harijan uplift. Bapa thought it was an inspiration from God and he immediately wrote to Mahatma Gandhi asking him if he could undertake the tour specially for this purpose. Gandhiji wrote back: “It is a good idea. Kindly draw up a programme how and where I would have to go.”

Bapa was extremely happy. In consultation with workers in different provinces, he drew up Gandhiji's tour programme.

The journey commenced from Wardha and ended at Kashi after nine months. The purses given to Mahatma Gandhi for Harijan uplift were handed over to Bapa who kept a scrupulous account of every pie. When the Sangh's accounts were placed before Mahatma Gandhi, he said: "Bapa's secretaryship of the Sangh is in itself a guarantee of proper custody and utilisation of the funds. There is no need for me to go into them".

About the care and caution Bapa observed in handling public funds, a former assistant secretary of the Sangh writes: "Bapa could not tolerate waste or misappropriation of the public funds operated by him or with which he was associated. He got furious at the slightest lapse. I think there were two instances in which small amounts belonging to the Sangh were not properly utilised. One case related to dishonesty while the other was merely a case of an amount from a fund for Harijan welfare having been spent on another item. The persons concerned were brought before Mahatma Gandhi in Delhi. Both explained the circumstances. Bapa was also present there. Gandhiji was attentively listening to them and trying to understand their point of view—both of them were experienced old workers. But Bapa had no patience. 'Why waste your time on them, they do not deserve any sympathy and should immediately be sent to jail,' he remonstrated with Gandhiji".

Some persons spend public funds properly but do not keep proper accounts. There are others who maintain proper accounts but do not spend judiciously. Thakkar Bapa was one of those rare persons who not only spend correctly but also maintained correct accounts. He believed that the practice regarding public money should be like Sita, not only pure, but above suspicion. On Bapa's 70th birthday, Kaka Saheb Kalelkar had very aptly said: "If dead currency is to be infused with life, it should be handed over to Thakkar Bapa".

During Mahatma Gandhi's tour for Harijan uplift, Bapa looked after his comforts and conveniences. He was, like a shadow, all the time with Gandhiji. Many a time, those who believed in untouchability did everything in their power to obstruct the mission. Pandas from Vaidyanath Dham attacked Gandhiji's motor car with lathis at the Jasidih railway station in Bihar, breaking the glass wind screens. Pieces of broken glass fell on Gandhiji; some stones were also thrown. One can only imagine how Bapa, a devotee of Gandhiji, must have felt then.

The party completed its tour of Bihar and reached Orissa on May 4. Gandhiji proposed to tour Orissa on foot. Bapa and other colleagues opposed the idea but Gandhiji was adamant. The journey from Jagannath Puri to Bhadrak was on foot. Gopabandhu Chowdhary was the leader of the party. The writer of these lines was also with the party in this historic journey for seven days. Under the hot May sun, Gandhiji walked briskly for eight or nine miles every day and some members of the party had to run to keep pace with him. Professor Malkani and this writer used to walk in the front with brooms, instead of a flag. Gandhiji said that brooms were a symbol of cleanliness. We had to clean ourselves, not only from outside, but from inside as well by removing the rubbish of untouchability, he said.

The devotion of the people of Orissa for Gandhiji and Bapa was something to be seen. They showered their love and affection on both.

Bapa described this happy journey in a letter to his younger brother, Keshavlal. He wrote:

“Gandhiji does not take long to undo the old and bring forth a new creation. He has done it just now. I am not writing about what he has done in politics. We have so far toured for six months by rail and road. Quake relief work intervened and we devoted

a month to Bihar. It was proper and necessary. But a hitch has now arisen regarding the tour of the remaining provinces. We have yet to cover Bengal, the U.P., Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Sind. This tour should have been completed in half the time devoted before the Bihar earthquake. In doing so, we would have been touring till July 31, which completes a year of Gandhiji's release from jail, or else it would have been time for him to go to jail again.

But this old man received God's command in the meantime. He had a sudden idea. I am sick of railway trains and motor cars; I am deaf with shouts of "Gandhiji ki jai" from towns people; I can bear it no more; this journey is, of course, to be completed but not in cars and railway trains; it has to be undertaken on foot as people used to do in earlier days.

Gandhiji had been insisting on this for the past ten or fifteen days. I argued that the time-table of the tour had already been sent to different provinces and specific programmes had been drawn up. Our time-table had been proved wrong on two or three occasions in the past and we should not disappoint people any more, or else they would think that we had not kept our word. If the workers in the provinces agreed to this change in programme, I would not object, I told him when he insisted further.

In the meantime we had reached Jagannath Puri. I had a new idea. I called the workers from Orissa and talked to them privately, explaining the pros and cons of Gandhiji's idea. They decided that Gandhiji must visit all the districts to which promises had

been given earlier; arrangements for journeying on foot would be made there, for half a day or a day, depending on Gandhiji's desire. It was a day of silence for Gandhiji. So we discussed the matter with him the next day. And he said: 'I do not abide by such agreements. I want the whole cake.' The old man's magnetism, attraction, hypnotism, tantrism, whatever it was, kept us spell-bound, quiet.

The gentle Oriya brethren said that they did not understand spiritual values; if he found some religious significance in walking, he should certainly do it; they would be wholly guided by him.

And the next day, Tuesday, May 9, we started on our journey at 5.30 in the morning on foot. This is the third day. We walk eight miles a day in two instalments, in the morning and in the evening. Grazed by chappals, I had three blisters on my feet during the first five miles of the journey.

Gandhiji told a "girl" (the superintendent of the Rajkot Vanita Ashram, Sushila Pai, daughter of the late R. B. Pai of the Bombay Municipality) that Bapa was very tired and his feet should be fomented with hot water. The old man knows all the tricks of old women of our area. 'Look, do not prick these blisters; I had also suffered and in a similar manner while travelling on foot during the Boer war; soak your feet first in warm water and soap, then in warm water and salt, then massage them with ghee'. This is how he treated my feet. The pain due to blisters and tiredness subsided. A bullock cart was arranged for me that very evening. Now I do part of the journey in the cart and the rest on foot.

You had done your journey to Jagannath Puri with father and mother on foot and I now remember the description you people gave. I remembered them in 1921 and remember them again now in 1934. The party was small on the first day, but it grew in size on the second and the third day. Villagers throng the roadside, keen to have Gandhiji's darshan and they have a look at his party. Gandhiji's dhoti does not reach his knees; he is naked above the waist; he almost runs with his hands on the shoulders of two girls on either side. Yesterday when his shoes began pinching him, he took them off and walked barefoot with the shoes in his hands. Even today he was walking without the shoes on. When I got down from the cart and began walking with him, he said: 'There are no pebbles on the road now and it is better to walk on bare feet'.

Today we are twenty one miles from Puri. We are staying in a pucca house. I have opened my bedding and am writing this letter from my bed. In the adjoining room, plantain leaves are being spread as dining plates and Harakhchand is looking after service. Conversation both in Hindi and Oriya continues.

Our daily routine is as follows:

- A. We all get up at 4 in the morning. I get up around 3 or 3.30. Gandhiji gets up even earlier, between 1 and 2, opens his bedding and begins writing letters in his famous Gujarati scrawl. By 4.20, ablutions are completed, there is prayer for 20 minutes upto 4.40. By 5.15 luggage is packed and we have had our breakfast. We move on by 5.30.

- B. We do four to seven miles in the morning and reach our next halt by 8 a.m. at the latest. There is a meeting there, after which we proceed to the place where our stay has been arranged by the workers who are to take us further. We bathe, wash and cook. As it is summer, we are using a lot of mangoes here.
- C. We finish our meals by 11 a.m. then write letters, relax or sleep. There is a lecture, between 2 and 3 and Gandhiji grants interviews to people coming from outside between 3 and 4. After attending to incidental work up to 4.30, we eat and then start again by 5.30.
- D. We walk three or four miles by 7 p.m. As soon as we reach the next halt, there is evening prayer, and after that a meeting. Then we proceed to the place where our stay has been arranged, attend to different things up to 10 p.m. and then retire for the night.

It is very pleasant to set out early in the morning at 5.30.”

According to the schedule drawn up by Bapa, the Orissa tour should have been completed between February 11 and 17 and that of Bihar between March 25 and April 7. But this had to be altered considerably due to the severe earthquake in Bihar on February 15. The Orissa tour was therefore undertaken in May. From Orissa, Gandhiji went straight to Bombay and from there to Poona. Some bigoted Hindu Sanatanist threw a bomb at Gandhiji's car in Poona. But that was not the car in which Gandhiji was travelling. Both Gandhiji and Bapa had a miraculous escape. Gandhiji described the incident as an act of a mad man.

From Poona, Gandhiji proceeded to Ahmedabad and from there to Kathiawar. He completed his tour by visiting places left out from his itinerary, Ajmer, Karachi, Lahore, Calcutta, Kanpur and Varanasi. Wherever Gandhiji and Bapa went, there was a new awakening. Thousands of people had a change of heart. People realised that untouchability was an evil. A large number of new workers came forward. Harijans entered famous temples and public places as equals of caste Hindus. During this nine-month tour, about Rs. 9 lakhs were collected for Harijan welfare.

But it was not the journey's end for Bapa. There was no end to it, and it continued. He visited some provinces over and over again. The day he returned to Delhi, arrangements for the next tour were finalised. And the days he spent in Delhi were full of files, letters and office work. He never postponed one day's work to the next. He worked with great concentration. The Harijan Nivas had no electricity at that time, but even in extremely hot weather he would sit in the office without a fan, deeply engrossed in his work. With a clear picture in his mind of the social and economic conditions of Harijans in various provinces, he wrote out detailed reports based on actual conditions and gave them to the press. He was moved by the sight of Harijan colonies in the cities, which were no better than a living hell. He used to meet the municipal authorities, send reports to the Government and would not rest till there was improvement in the living conditions in these slums.

Bapa was most disturbed whenever he found Harijan colonies that had no drinking water. He was deeply moved when, during his tour of Kutch and Kathiawar, Harijans told him: "We are compelled to steal water. When caught, our women are stoned and their pitchers are broken. We are forced to drink water from the ponds where women wash dirty laundry and cows and buffaloes bathe. We have to depend on cattle ponds,

with proliferating insects in the water, as our only source of drinking water”.

Bapa was moved to tears. On hearing this pathetic tale of woe of the depressed and dispossessed Harijans, he said: “I am ashamed of myself as a Hindu and as one belonging to Kathiawar. When will Kathiawar wake up? We make our Harijan brethren suffer and squirm even for a pitcherful of water. Kathiawar should be ashamed of itself”.

His moving appeal brought some funds and soon many villages had wells for Harijans.

Bapa was particularly attentive to the needs of Bhangis. He was distressed to see that sweepers were denied even the basic facilities. Pots were not provided in latrines and no water was available to wash them, and yet the sweeper was expected to clean them. Could anybody else do this dirty work? Bapa was however not disheartened. He had faith in his workers and the inspiration he provided did not often go waste.

The Harijan work had been well organised and was spread all over the country when, one day, Bapa felt that he had not been able to devote enough attention to the Adivasis. He decided to resign as the Secretary of the Harijan Sevak Sangh and accordingly wrote to Gandhiji. But Gandhiji would not let him go. He wrote back:

“Bapa, there is no limit to your greed. Your Secretaryship of the Harijan Sevak Sangh surely is no hindrance. You and Ghanshyam Das have jointly undertaken responsibility of the Sangh. Now death alone can release you from it. He as well as I need your moral strength and ‘self-dedication. Your Secretaryship symbolises it. You can give as much of your time as you like to the Adivasis while discharging your duty as Secretary of the Sangh.

You do not mean to tell me that you will want to resign even after that latitude. Just for your sake I have detained you. Not that a substitute could be found. But the eradication of the sin of untouchability calls for the moral force of the pure in heart. Do not forget that the irreligion of untouchability is today being sanctified as religion. That is not so in the case of Adivasis. I do not mind therefore your dedicating yourself to the service of the Adivasis, but it must not be at the cost of the Harijans”.

Bapa had nothing to say in reply. With determination he decided: “*Sangham Sharanam Gachchami*” (To the shelter of the Sangh I go).

From 1932 to 1951, the relationship between him and the Sangh was that of interdependence. He had decided to wash away the sins of untouchability and to work for Harijan uplift till his last breath. The fruit of his dedicated work can be seen at so many places today. Whatever the Sangh has achieved, it owes it to Gandhiji’s inspiration and Bapa’s devoted service. Who can doubt that the day when, after Independence, the Constituent Assembly put an end to untouchability, had actually been brought nearer by Gandhiji and Bapa? Bapa’s incessant struggle, his hard, dedicated work, his devoted service for giving the backward, exploited, traditionally humiliated Harijans a rightful, respectable place in society can never be forgotten. He constantly strengthened constructive activities and organised publicity for this purpose. When a national Government was established at the Centre and popular governments took charge of the states, he constantly reminded them of their duty towards Harijans.

Bapa was ill and confined to his bed in Bhavnagar when the Central Board of the Harijan Sevak Sangh met in 1950. He sent the following message:

“We have to remember that the pledge Gandhiji gave on his behalf and on behalf of the Hindu community has not been honoured so far. The law has, of course, given the Harijans the right to draw water from wells and tanks, but, in practice, there are hindrances in their enjoyment of the right. It is, therefore, the duty of the Hindu society, specially of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, to ensure the enjoyment of all the rights by the Harijans and to remove the impediments in their way. One thing more. We will now have to shift our activities from towns to the countryside. Most of the difficulties the Harijans face are in the villages”.

Beautiful buildings, colourful sculptures in marble, sweet-smelling, flowering gardens which catch our eyes did not appeal to Bapa. He believed that the huge sums of money spent on palaces, buildings and temples had not been usefully and properly utilised. These resources, according to him, should have been utilised in raising the standard of living of the depressed classes.

While touring Gwalior State, Bapa once reached Shivpuri and his co-workers took him to see the beautifully laid out garden and the marble building. But Bapa was most unhappy. “What a waste of lakhs of rupees earned by the poor people by the sweat of their brow on a project of mere entertainment in a State where the condition of Harijans is so pitiable”, he observed.

Bapa had also visited Nathdwara, but he did not enter the temple, as Harijan entry into the temple was banned. He was mortified by the princely riches of the place. He wrote a long letter to Gandhiji expressing his pain and sorrow. He gave an estimate of how many free primary schools could be run on the annual income of the temple. He also contributed an article to the *Harijan* on the subject.

Jaipur has been described as India's Paris for its beautiful layout and buildings. But when Bapa went there and saw the deplorable slums where sweepers lived, he was in anguish. Seeing the contrast between the so much talked about beauty of Jaipur and the pitiable condition of its poor dwellers, he wrote an article strongly criticising the utter neglect of the sweepers colony. He even altered the saying about Kashmir to write: "If ever there was a hell, it was here, it was here, it was here."

Bapa's touchstone to decide whether something was beautiful or ugly, proper or improper was whether it helped the poor Harijans, Adivasis and other backward communities or not.

Kishorelal Mashruwala once said that Bapa was a true believer in God. But he had found his God in the huts of the depressed classes.

This writer remembers a day at the Harijan Ashram in Delhi. Bapa had cataract and his vision had been affected. His colleagues read out letters and other papers to him. But he had not given up coming to the office. One evening he was lying in an easy chair singing a devotional Gujarati song in which the devotee expresses a desire to see Nandkumar (Krishna) every day.

This writer passed that way and light-heartedly asked: "Why are you pining to see your Nandkumar? Where is he in any case?" In a voice choking with emotion, Bapa replied: "Why not? I had my darshan of Nandkumar so many times in the Gokul of the Harijans and Adivasis. Those naked children covered with dirt are my Nandkumar".

And he went on singing, repeating the same line again and again. Without such dedicated attachment, it would be impossible to render true service to the people.

X

States People's Movement

Thakkar Bapa had accepted the service of the depressed people as the aim of his life even before he was a member of the Servants of India Society. The three main spheres of his activities were Harijan welfare, Adivasi welfare and relief work among people suffering from natural calamities, like floods and famine. These aspects have been dealt with in previous chapters.

The Servants of India Society was considered to be basically a political organisation. But its politics, from the very inception, was moderate. Temperamentally, Bapa was not a political person. He tried to keep away from this sphere. But he was not completely aloof from it for he could not countenance any repression of the people and often raised his voice against it and strongly criticised the Government. During the 1930 movement, the police had included his name in the "black list". He was even arrested in Ahmedabad while supervising the volunteers who were picketing liquor shops. In his statement before the magistrate in the court, he said: "When today the armed might of the British Empire faces the unarmed volunteers, nobody should expect justice". The expression cannot be called very moderate.

During the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Congress, Bapa, with the National flag in his hands, led the students and workers of the Harijan Nivas in a procession. He had not sought any permission for this from the Society. He always welcomed actions that led to any awakening, even to a revolution, but his own life was devoted to the service of the depressed people.

Although he was apolitical, when he was invited in 1926 to preside over the Bhavnagar State People's Conference, he accepted the offer only to be able to serve the people who were suffering repression. Gandhiji had sent a message in which he said: "The Conference has honoured itself by electing Amritlal Thakkar, the Guru of Bhils and Harijans, as its President." He also expressed the hope that khadi, which provided a living to hundreds of Harijan brethren, would be given due importance and the stigma of untouchability that attaches to Hinduism would be removed.

Mahatma Gandhi's hope was not misplaced as he had judged Bapa's nature and sympathy correctly. In his presidential address, Bapa put forth demands in line with these hopes. And the Diwan of Bhavnagar, Sir Prabhashankar Pattani, accepted some of them on Bapa's insistence. During his tenure as the President of the Conference, he visited many villages in the state and made a close study of the problems of the people, particularly of the untouchables.

In 1928 Bapa was elected President of the Kathiawar Political Conference which held its annual session at Porbandar for three days from January 20 with great fanfare. Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Abbas Tyabji and Durbar Gopaldas were among those who attended the session. The representatives of the States' people gave an affectionate welcome to their President. With his typical humility, Bapa said in his address : "I do not understand how this man who lived with Bhils and untouchables, who is not political by any description, should have been elected President of the Political Conference. This man has only one pride, that of being a simple Saurashtrian."

In his speech, Bapa dealt in detail with all those evil customs, practices and laws which strangulated the aspirations of the people and made it difficult for them to breathe in a free

atmosphere. Forced labour and excessive taxation had oppressed the people, and the Harijans were not even considered to be human beings, he said.

In conclusion, Bapa called upon the Kathiawar States to unite for their development, for the freedom of their people, for the progress of the country and to willingly restrain their autocratic authority. He drew a beautiful word-picture of what Kathiawar could become and appealed to the people to strive for the realisation of this dream.

Bapa's presidentship of the Conference provided new strength to the efforts Mahatma Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel and other leaders were making to awaken the Kathiawar people. There was a new consciousness and the agitation for independence received a new spurt. Bapa also lent a hand in the setting up of the All India States People's Conference and he was intimately connected with its activities. The autocratic rulers of Indian States paid scant attention to their people's welfare. They were loyal only to the British authorities whose patronage assured them safety. They pleased British officials in every way while cruelly suppressing their own people, who were not permitted even to raise their voice against the tyranny. Many of them lived in great luxury and wasted the States' resources on luxuries abroad. But they tried to present a picture of a welfare regime. Some States had, of course, initiated some welfare activities, but they were just like drops in the ocean. Public workers there were impatient for political reforms. They felt the need of a strong people's organisation, specially because the Congress was devoting all its energies to British India. As the rulers were organised in the Princes' Chamber to raise their collective voice, it was necessary for the States' people to have their own all-India organisation. It was all the more necessary in 1926 when the people from the States were required to give evidence and present their demands before the Butler Committee appointed by the British Government.

The All-India States People's Conference thus came into being. Soon after its birth, an incident proved the value and utility of the organisation.

At the annual session of the Conference, held under C. Y. Chintamani in May 1929, representatives from Patiala distributed copies of a memorandum they had submitted to the Viceroy against the autocratic ruler of their State. Charges of murder, rape, illegal confinement of women, loot and similar serious offences were levelled against the then ruler in the memorandum. The Conference appointed an inquiry committee to investigate the long list of allegations. Bapa was the committee's acting President. The ruler of Patiala was then the President of the Princes' Chamber. It was no easy task to inquire into the charges of heinous crimes against him. The committee, however, toured Ambala, Ludhiana and other towns and recorded evidence from thousands of persons. Written evidence and certified documents were also received by the committee. The committee prepared a list of twelve serious charges against the ruler. Many prominent newspapers editorially thanked Bapa and the committee for attracting the nation's attention to such a serious situation.

Bapa's services to the people of Indian States will be gratefully remembered.

XI

Other Activities

Those who want to serve do not have to look for opportunities, which crop up of their own accord. Besides working in the spheres of Harijan and Adivasi welfare and famine and flood relief, Bapa found opportunities to serve the people in other ways as well. A glimpse of what he did for the State's people was given in the previous chapter. Khadi work and rural women's and children's welfare were two other fields which had the benefit of his attention.

It may come as news to people engaged in khadi work today that Bapa was among the pioneers in this field. But it is true all the same. The Congress had, through its resolution on non-cooperation passed in 1920, urged the boycott of foreign goods and popularisation of Swadeshi. Gandhiji suggested a programme of collecting one crore rupees in the Tilak Swarajya Fund and distributing twenty lakh spinning wheels in the country.

Some of the followers of Gandhiji discussed the question of popularising spinning wheels in Kathiawar. Jivanlal Motichand and Harakhchand Motichand, two brothers of Chorwar who lived in Calcutta, were keen to make Mahatma Gandhi's programme a success. The problem was to find a person who could be entrusted with the task. Jivanlalbhai knew Bapa well and he naturally thought of him in this connection. He told Mahatma Gandhi that if Amritlal Thakkar took the responsibility upon himself, the programme would be a success in Kathiawar. Gandhiji liked the idea. When Bapa was asked to take it up, he readily agreed. He would not let go this golden opportunity of

helping thousands of the poor, specially the untouchables. He undertook a tour to survey the area and to locate villages where the work could be started. He set up a centre at Amreli and prepared a scheme to popularise khadi. Weavers were already there, but since hand spinning had gone out of vogue, they bought yarn from textile mills. Bapa bought bales of cotton, got it carded and distributed it for spinning. Women readily agreed to take it up as it provided them with work and income. Though they received only two annas a day, it was better than nothing at all. Spinning wheels appeared in scores of villages and hand spinning was revived in a big way. Bapa got 5000 wheels going in just four months. Workers in Saurashtra were amazed at his organising capacity.

Bapa had estimated that the peasant family which lived on one meal a day could have two if it took to spinning. When he saw his experiment succeeding, his hopes rose. The spinning wheel had a bright future, Bapa was convinced it could take the place of a subsidiary profession. It was also apparent that weavers and carpenters benefited indirectly from hand-spinning. Bapa felt that the best cottage industry for the country was spinning. He wrote in a letter: "Revival of the Charkha is no stop-gap or temporary part of village life, it is a permanent feature, and it should not be forgotten that India lives in the villages, not the towns."

To increase khadi production, Bapa organised conferences of weavers, who were considered untouchable, and tried to persuade them to use only the hand spun yarn. The khadi work had thus an additional advantage of fighting untouchability. Spinning became so popular in Kathiawar that the region was considered a pioneer in the field. A hundred maunds of yarn was now produced every day.

Bapa was fully engrossed in the work. He used to join the khadi hawking teams and be present at bonfires of foreign cloth.

It is said that the leaders of the Servants of India Society did not like Bapa involving himself in this. Khadi was supplementary to the non-cooperation movement which did not fit in with the Society's aims and objects. But the manner in which Bapa gave the khadi work a firm footing in Kathiawar earned him the gratitude of constructive workers.

Bapa was devoted to Gandhiji. Gandhiji considered himself to be a "non-member member" of the Servants of India Society which meant that even though he was not a regular member of the Society, due to his respect for Gokhale he considered himself to be one. In the same manner, Bapa could be considered a 'non-member' of the Gandhi Seva Sangh. Bapa had merged his identity in Bapu. He never disobeyed any directive from Gandhiji. He boldly supported Gandhiji's stand and was always determined to take up the constructive programme laid down by Gandhiji.

While under detention in the Aga Khan Palace, Kasturba died on February 22, 1944, the entire nation was grief stricken. There was a spontaneous resolve to collect Rs 75 lakhs for the Kasturba Memorial Fund and to present this amount as a purse to Gandhiji on October 2, 1944, when he completed 75 years. The money would be spent on women's welfare in the country.

A board of trustees was set up for the purpose and Bapa was appointed its secretary. As usual, he showed amazing energy in organising collections. The amount of work he put in would have tired out dozens of youngmen put together. He toured the country and set up local committees. Only his dedication to Bapu and Ba could have given him all that energy.

On October 2, 1944, he presented the purse to Mahatma Gandhi and said: "Bapu, I am grateful to God that I was the instrument through which the nation collected over a crore of rupees instead of Rs 75 lakhs only and I put it at your feet on your 75th birthday."

On April 1, 1945, the trust deed of the fund was executed. Gandhiji was the Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Bapa was its General Secretary. Gandhiji had suggested that Bapa be appointed life-secretary of the trust, but Bapa declined. He was renominated to the post in 1946 after he had agreed to serve the trust as its General Secretary for a period of three years. After Mahatma Gandhi's death, Sardar Patel was the Trust's Chairman and on his insistence Bapa agreed to be re-appointed on the post for a further period of three years. On Sardar Patel's death, the Board elected Bapa as its Chairman. But he could not serve the trust in that capacity for long. About a week later, on January 19, 1951, he died.

There were many proposals as to how the fund should be utilised, but Gandhiji did not agree with any of them as they did not conform to the life Ba had lived. Gandhiji told the trustees: "Ba was a simple woman who liked village life and lived there. Since she served the village community, the fund collected in her name should be spent on the welfare of women and children in the villages. This welfare work should include maternity, health and medical care and Balwadis." The trustees agreed to this programme.

Bapa set up women and child welfare centres in every state. The trust's office was looked after by Shyamlal, who had been Bapa's trusted lieutenant since the early days of the Harijan Sevak Sangh and had been trained by him. His services were lent to the trust and to that extent the Sangh's work suffered. Sushila Pai and Shyamlal undertook the work. Trained gram sevikas were sent to far-off villages and inaccessible Adivasi areas and they worked there with courage, determination and dedication. After Gandhiji, Dada Sahib Mavalankar acted as the chairman and the trust work flourished under him.

The central office of the trust was in Wardha. After some time, Sardar Patel laid the foundation of a village, five miles from

Indore where the all-India training centre for gram sevikas was established. The trust office was also shifted there.

As Mahatma Gandhi desired, the centres of the trust are run by women workers and men are engaged there only as an exception. The work has progressed on the foundation laid by Bapa.

Even while discharging his responsibilities to the Harijan Sevak Sangh, Bapa found time to inspect village centres set up by the trust and to inspire women organisers to serve rural women and children with devotion. When in 1949, Satyabhama Kulkarni, a worker of the trust, boldly stopped some persons in Siddhawadi from distilling liquor, Bapa congratulated her. He said in his letter:

“A letter from sister Prema Kantak was read out to me today about the work you did in Siddhawadi, near Pandharpur. I was very happy to hear about it. You showed exemplary courage by entering the place where illicit distillation was going on, all by yourself and in the dark. It was not an easy task to face those cruel and violent men. But you did it and I congratulate you. I also congratulate your husband who permitted you to live in that small village and take up welfare work.

You fought against the sin of drinking with Bapu's weapon of non-violence. I hope your example will be emulated in the country, particularly Bihar, Tamilnad, Assam, our timid Gujarat and backward Rajasthan.”

Such inspiring words from Bapa gave new heart to those women serving in far off village centres.

Bapa was always willing to take up any work that served a public cause, alleviated the suffering of the people or contributed to the uplift of the depressed classes. He was associated with a large number of organisations, serving them in different capacities. After his tour of Bundelkhand, he thought of setting up the Bundelkhand Lok Seva Mandal but it languished in the absence of capable local workers.

Bundelkhand had been perhaps the only part of the country left out of the itinerary of this untiring journeyman on the road that led to people's welfare. Bapa once wrote to this writer: "So many times have you talked to me about the poverty and shocking conditions in Bundelkhand. I want to visit the region before I die. You will have to accompany me."

The torrid summer of 1949 was chosen for the tour. Ram Sahai Tewari, a Congress worker of Chhattarpur, drew up a 13-day programme. Bapa was taken not only to the towns, but to the interior villages in scorching 'loo' along very bad roads. Except for a rest for a couple of hours in the afternoon, the journey, undertaken every day, would continue from morning till evening. He was old, the conveyance was a jeep, the heat was intense and the route through the hilly tract was a mere apology for a road. Workers accompanying Bapa were apprehensive about his health. Bapa saw the heart-rending poverty with his own eyes, semi-naked men, women and children, working for five to seven annas a day on the roads or ten to fourteen annas a day under the Government when the cost of living was so high. He saw people eating black loaves of bread made of parched *mahua*, and flour made of wild berries.

Bapa saw a few Chamars in a hilly forest village, eighty miles from the nearest railway station, and asked them if they sent their children to the school. A middle aged Chamar laughed wildly, drawing Bapa's attention to his sunken belly. The laughter

was a chastisement, a sullen resentment at the ignorance implied in the question, an audacious derision. "Our children are dying of hunger and the grandpa comes here to ask us about educating them." Bapa understood the feeling behind the laughter and he said: "Really, I should not have put that question."

Bapa was shocked and anguished at the grinding poverty of the region. He wrote in an article "Whenever Viyogi Hari talked to me about the poverty in Bundelkhand, I thought it was an exaggeration. What I saw with my own eyes defies description". At the conclusion of the tour, he decided to set up the Bundelkhand Lok Seva Mandal and took preliminary steps in this regard.

The Musahar Seva Mandal of Bihar was also set up towards the evening of his life. He could not bear the extreme poverty and horrid living conditions of this community of Harijans. Musahars were at the lowest rung of the social ladder, at some places they did not even have thatched huts for shelter, they were all illiterate; their life was worse than that of animals. Bapa felt that special efforts would be required to improve their condition. At least some boarding houses and Ashram-type schools should be opened for their children immediately. He was on the look out for public spirited young men to take up this work. On his sick-bed, when he received a letter from Bihar informing him that the Musahar Seva Mandal had started functioning, Bapa was happy that his desire had been fulfilled.

Tributes

Shyamlal, Bapa's close associate, had written letters to a few friends suggesting that Bapa's 71st birthday, falling on November 29, 1939, should be celebrated as a festival. His friends liked the idea and suggested that a small committee should be set up to organise the function and a purse of Rs. 7,000 presented to him on that day. When Gandhiji was contacted, he wrote the following in the *Harijan Bandhu*:

“Bapa will complete 70 years of his life on November 29. He has been like a father to the Harijans and all those communities which have been divided into many categories after having been described as semi-barbarous, animist or worshippers of animals. The workers in the Harijan Nivas of Delhi have drawn up a scheme to celebrate his birthday at a function which should appeal to him. They also want to present a purse of Rs. 7,000 to Bapa on his birthday—for Harijan work. They have asked me to bless the scheme and to publish it. Thakkar Bapa is a rare servant of the people. Conceit and ostentation are unknown to him. He does not need praise from anybody. His only contentment and only recreation are his work. Even in old age his zeal for work has not flagged. He is himself an institution. Once I had written to him to take rest and he immediately wrote back: “How can I rest when there is so much work to be done? My

work itself should be my rest.” The amazing energy he finds for his work shames even the young around him. It would be an insult to a person who carries the heavy load of Harijan welfare on his strong shoulders to present a purse of only Rs. 7,000 to him for his work. These servants of Harijans should resolve to collect at least Rs. 70,000 from all over the country. Even this amount is negligible for such work and such a person. It would be very good to collect pies and paise from Harijans and Bhils. They know their Bapa. But the affluent and middle class people also know him and love him. I have no doubt that they will generously donate for this cause as well as the person who represents it.”

This appeal from Mahatma Gandhi had its effect. Over a lakh of rupees were collected for the fund.

The Jubilee celebrations were organised on a large scale in the Gwalia Tank Maidan in Bombay on November 29, 1939. Besides the presidents, secretaries and prominent workers of the Harijan Sevak Sangh from different provinces, Vallabhbhai Patel, Bhulabhai Desai, Hridayanath Kunzru, Mahadev Desai, Mangaldas Pakvasa, K.M.Munshi, Jairamdas Daulatram, Purushotamdas Thakurdas and many other prominent leaders were present.

Mahadev Desai read out a hand-written message from Mahatma Gandhi: “I should have been present at the seventieth birthday celebration of Thakkar Bapa, but I am physically unfit for such functions. It is my heart-felt hope that he may live a hundred years. Bapa was born only to serve the downtrodden, whether they be untouchables or Bhils, Santhals or Khasis. Even the appreciation of his service means some little service to these downtrodden people. His services have carried India considerably forward towards the goal.”

Sardar Patel in his speech said: “Bapa’s work has inspired us. The compassion he has in his heart for the poor is like God’s *darshan* itself. Whatever has been achieved in the field of Harijan welfare is an eloquent testimonial to the dedicated work of Bapa and Gandhiji.”

After Bhulabhai Desai, Bala Sahib Kher, Hridayanath Kunzru, Verrier Elwin, D. K. Karve and Dr. Solanki had paid rich tributes to Bapa. C. Rajagopalachari, who presided over the function, presented the purse, put a *tilak* on Bapa’s forehead and said: “Thakkar Bapa’s service of the depressed classes and Harijans has meant that so much more sin was avoided. Bapa is busy washing the stigma that attaches to our great religion. Millions of our Harijans are lost in our own darkness. To bring them back, great men like Gandhi and Bapa are engaged in a *tapasya*. We pray that we may be able to help them in this work”.

More important was the purse of 971 paise presented to Bapa by the sweepers of Bombay.

In his reply, Bapa said: “I think a speck of dust has been made into an elephant here. I am a very humble worker. Whatever labour and service I have done, I had learnt from my father. If anything has been achieved through me, the credit must go to Gandhiji. It is only as a result of his *tapasya* that we are today trying to embrace our neglected Harijan brothers.

“It is a happy augury that Harijans sit with us in the legislative assemblies as our equals. But the Adivasis have no representation there. The Government has done so little for them. The Hindu society has not even tried to go to them. Their uplift is, therefore, urgent and important. The purse you have given to me will be handed over to the Harijan Sevak Sangh so that it can be utilised for the best purpose”.

Thirty-eight prominent leaders and social workers in the country, including Rajendra Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Mavalankar, Kishorelal Mashruwala, Kaka Kalelkar, Devadas Gandhi, Ghanshyam Das Birla, Rameshwari Nehru, Pattabhi Sitaramayya and Hridayanath Kunzru issued the following appeal for the presentation of a commemoration volume to Thakkar Bapa on his 81st birthday.

“Shri Amritlal V. Thakkar, affectionately known all over India as Thakkar Bapa, will be completing his 80th year on November 29. He is truly the Grand Old Man of India today. There is no figure in the country more venerated than Bapa. Aged as he is, he is as active as young workers and inspires them by his untiring devotion to a multitude of causes. When one contemplates the long unbroken record of service of the forlorn and the forgotten which Bapa’s life has been, one realises why Gandhiji once said that his ambition was to equal Bapa’s long record of selfless service.

Shri Srinivasa Shastri who worked with Bapa for long years as a Servant of India referred to Bapa as the supreme embodiment of human sympathy. It is needless to recount the various fields of his untiring service, such as famine relief work, Bhil Seva, Harijan Seva, Kasturba work and, indeed, the service of all sections of humanity that are neglected. It is fitting that the country should honour itself by honouring one so great and so rare.

It is proposed to bring out a commemoration volume and to present it to Thakkar Bapa at a formal ceremony in Delhi on his forthcoming birthday. The volume will contain articles and pictures relating to the great life of Thakkar Bapa and will embody

descriptions and treatises on the numerous humanitarian activities with which he has been closely connected. It is estimated that the production of the volume will cost about Rs. 25,000. This amount, we are confident, will be met privately from the numerous known and unknown friends and admirers of Thakkar Bapa. The sale proceeds of the volume will be donated to any fund named by Thakkar Bapa.”

The much awaited November 29, 1949 arrived. The function was held in the Constitution Club of Delhi. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel presided. He presented the volume containing important articles and photographs relating to Bapa's life and activities. Present on the occasion were Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Jagjivan Ram, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Dadasaheb Mavalankar and a large number of leaders, social workers, members of the Constituent Assembly, Ambassadors and guests from the Diplomatic Corps.

Mavalankar was the first to pay his tribute: “Bapa's body is old but he is still young. His heart is innocent like a child's. He is the repository of untiring, unlimited energy. He cannot be content without serving the downtrodden.”

Maulana Azad congratulated Bapa and said: “We have also to congratulate this country where he was born and where he has done monumental welfare work.”

Jagjivan Ram recounted a puranic episode. Harassed by Asuras, the Devatas went to Dadhichi for protection. Dadhichi offered his bones for the *Vajra*, a weapon which was used to exterminate Asuras. Like Dadhichi, Thakkar Bapa has dedicated his every living breath for the service of the depressed and backward classes. Whenever and wherever there is a natural calamity, floods, famine or earthquake, people remember Bapa

and Bapa rushes there to help them. “I call him the Dadhichi of this epoch”, he said.

Then Jawaharlal rose to speak. He was overwhelmed with emotion:

“I do not know if I should congratulate you or we should all congratulate ourselves or the country. There are a few like you who are so lost in service that it is very difficult to think of them apart from their work. Such persons became institutions unto themselves. So Bapa is no more an entity as a person, he has become a repository of various activities. When one thinks of you, a multitude of thoughts come to mind. In different parts of the country, in the hills and forests, you so identified yourself with Harijans and other downtrodden people that it is not easy to think of you separate from them. Hundreds of pictures at once crowd the mind’s eye. Man comes to this world, lives his life and leaves. But the work he does lives on, for work goes on for ever, it never ends. Well, everyone does one’s work, but he not only took interest in the service of humanity, but was almost lost in it.

“So, Bapa does not need congratulations or reward. He has received his full reward in his work itself. His life has truly been a success. It gladdens one’s heart to see such men in the world; they inspire us and there is an element of envy as well. Such men solve the intricate problems through service during their own lifetime and they are unruffled even in the face of the biggest problems.

“Thakkar Bapa followed a path, marched on it for an age and the sphere of his activities expanded. But the work remained the same, the object the same and with confidence he went ahead. It is, therefore, natural to have pride and fervour in seeing him. The envy is there because we wish we also had the same capacity. So we congratulate ourselves on Thakkar Bapa’s birthday that we are fortunate to see this day”.

Then, Vallabhbhai Patel, who was in the chair, said: “Thakkar Bapa never discriminated between castes, communities or provinces. Wherever there was misery or calamity, he reached there at once. Everyone looks up to him alone on such occasions. His life is truly worth being emulated by young men of India. It was not for him to enter legislative assemblies, he did not consider that his duty. Even so, we brought him to the Constituent Assembly, as he has his special experience about depressed classes. Who can think of their welfare more than Bapa? Many among us think today that the people can be served only through the legislatures. But this is excessive attachment. There are so many fields of service. All of us should learn from Bapa how the people, particularly the depressed and backward people, should be served with devotion and dedication, through incessant hard work. He has also taught us that there can be no rest in service. Selfless service gives fifty-fold more happiness than that derived from rest. The country needs today dedicated servants of the people like Bapa, not those who merely talk. Flowery speeches do not contribute to welfare of the people. Everyone wants today to be a leader, not a soldier. Without being a follower, nobody can become a leader. Bapa never desired to be a leader, but the service he rendered made him the leader whom we are all felicitating here on his 81st birthday.”

After saying this, Patel embraced Bapa and presented the commemoration volume to him.

When Bapa stood up to reply, emotions welled up in his throat and tears filled his eyes. He came forward unsteadily and spoke slowly: “I do not find myself worthy of the great honour and felicitation. Girls from the Gujarati Samaj described me *yogiraj* in their Garba song. This is gross exaggeration. There was no need to hold such a function for an ordinary man, a sinner like me. But brother Devadas Gandhi was so affectionately insistent that all my protestations were in vain and I had to come here.

“I am no Vaishnava, no Yogiraj. I am a very ordinary person. Even a culprit. When I was in service as an engineer, I accepted bribes twice, once there was a moral lapse too. Surdas asks in his devotional song Who can be more wicked, cunning, and lustful than I?’ This applies to me. Whatever I did, it was out of a sense of duty. Even that I can no more continue. I am half blind and disabled. With this feeble body, I cannot serve the people. It is great magnanimity of Sardar Vallabhbhai, Panditji, Maulana Sahib and other sisters and brothers who gave me this great honour. With all humility I express my gratitude to them”.

A number of messages were received on the occasion which were published in the commemoration volume. Some of them are reproduced here:

“Revered Thakkar Bapa is now 80. It is proposed to present a volume to him on the occasion which would have a collection of articles on the glory of his services. It has now become customary to express gratitude in this manner. Gratitude can be expressed in many ways and this can be one of them.

“But it seems to me that a more appropriate thing to do on the occasion would be to start a countrywide campaign to improve the working conditions of sweepers in every municipality or to fight for their freedom from bondage. If the Congress takes up some such legislative measure for the welfare of the depressed classes and implements it through constant efforts, this would also purify Congressmen. I had expressed this view to the President of the Central Provinces Congress, Kannamwar, when he came to see me.

“Bapa was inspired by Anna Sahib Karve in his mission of service. Anna Sahib is older by 12 years and is ordinarily in good health. We should hope that Bapa’s old body, purified by the service of the depressed, would get its inspiration for health from the same Guru”.

- Vinoba

“Thakkar Bapa is one of those very few great men who spend every moment of their lives in serving others, specially the poorest, most depressed and neglected sections of the people. Service of the Harijans and Adivasis is Bapa’s mission. There is hardly ever a moment in his life when he is not thinking or doing something for them. Therefore, whenever one thinks of selfless service, Bapa’s picture invariably comes before the eyes. It is rare good fortune of the country that it had a man like him. May God keep him among us for a long time so that we and the coming generations benefit and learn from his life.

- Rajendra Prasad

“Vyas said that whatever had been stated in crores of books, he would say in half a couplet. ‘Service of others is virtue, giving them pain is sin’. Thakkar Bapa can best be described as the embodiment of the Dharma enunciated in this line.

“My close contact with Bapa dates back to 1932. Then Bapu was on a fast unto death in the Yarvada jail and some of us were worried about a solution of this problem of Harijans through discussions with Shri Ambedkar. As time passed, Bapu’s body grew weaker and his life ebbed. We were angry that some people were worried only about the number of seats Harijans should have in the legislatures. Then Bapa was entrusted with the task of working out the exact number of seats to be reserved for Harijans and he discharged this duty with complete impartiality. The soul of the Poona Pact is the franchise for Harijans and that is Bapa’s gift. We signed the document (prepared by Bapa) without even looking at it”.

- Ghanshyam Das Birla

“The statutory provisions incorporated in the Constitution itself for safeguarding the interests of Adivasis and provisions for assisting their development into full-fledged citizens will for ever be a standing tribute to the indefatigable labour of Bapa and his

associates in their cause. Even amongst social reformers, few indeed have worked in such adverse circumstances and with such selfless concentration on a gigantic task like this and nobody need be jealous if he has the good fortune to be acknowledged as the truest friend of the downtrodden. May he live long and may his life be a worthy inspiration for generations to come.”

- B. G. Kher

The same evening, the Harijan Nivas of Delhi organised a function, limited to the workers there, under Purushottam Das Tandon. After the students and workers of the workshop had paid tribute to Bapa in their speeches, Bapa respectfully remembered his four Gurus—his father Vitthaldas, Karve, Shinde and Deodhar. He explained why he had not included Gandhi and Gokhale in the list: “I do not consider myself worthy of being called their disciple. I owe a debt of gratitude to the four Gurus which I cannot repay. I have learnt a lot in the field of service from Christian missionaries and I have received inspiration from them. It was these Christian missionaries who kindled my sympathy for lepers. I bow to them.”

He blessed the workers and students: “May God give you strength to fulfil the hopes I have in you.”

In the end, Tandon bowed before Bapa and said: “It is my great good fortune that I greet and felicitate a saint like Thakkar Bapa. I pray to God that we continue to draw inspiration from his life to march on the path of service.”

Noakhali

The news of inhuman atrocities committed by the Muslim Leaguers in East Bengal in the last months of 1946 on the minority Hindu community, the burning and looting of their homes and molestation of women had greatly agitated Gandhiji. He had decided to quench that fire or to be consumed by it himself. And he set off with a few followers. When Noakhali was burning and Mahatma Gandhi was conducting his last experiment of non-violence there, Bapa could not sit idle in Delhi. Incessant hard work had sapped his health and his vision was impaired but even then he decided to be with Gandhiji. And Gandhiji did not stop him either. How could he deny Bapa a share in the tragedy (or the triumph) that the Noakhali experiment was to be?

Gandhiji had quenched the communal fire in Calcutta. Now he entered Noakhali with a party led by Satish Babu. The first halt was at Chaumuhani. He received details of the inhuman acts perpetrated in the villages in the area and went to some of these villages to see things for himself. Wherever Gandhiji went, Bapa was with him.

Gandhiji talked with the Muslim League leaders in Kajirkehel on the question of restoration of peace. The talks failed. He then decided to disperse the party and to sit alone in a village. All women and men in the party were sent to different villages of the area and were asked to strive for peace in the villages separately allotted to them. Their test lay in going to those villages singly and all alone and to strive for peace. Bapa tried to

dissuade him but Gandhiji refused to budge. Bapa was apprehensive about girls and young women of the party and his fears were not allayed.

Bapa selected the Char area for himself. It had a very large population of the Namsudra Harijans. Their village, Charham, had been completely destroyed and they had been subjected to terrible barbarism. After an inspection of the village, Acharya Kripalini said: "A large number of houses were gutted. All the property and household goods had been plundered. The people did not have a grain of food left with them. Women had been abducted. There were forcible conversions and Hindu names had been changed into Muslim ones. Temples had been destroyed and idols broken. The vermilion mark of wifeness on the foreheads of women was obliterated."

Bapa selected this Charmandal for his stay in the hope that he would be able to give solace to the helpless and terrified Harijans. He wept at the hair-raising tales of inhuman murders and atrocities. Hearing them and seeing things for himself, he realised how easily man turns into a monster.

The people were terrified and could not muster the courage to meet Bapa when he called them. It was only after great persuasion and consolation that they came forward to relate the details of atrocities. Bapa distributed clothes, articles required for offering prayers and shell bangles and vermilion to women. They got rid of their fear, picked up courage and their households again resounded with Kirtan. Bapa was happy at the restoration of the people's confidence and often he thought that it was only the miraculous touch of Bapu that had wrought the change.

There was a notorious bad character, named Tuku Mian, in the region who had killed many Hindus and harassed others. One evening Bapa censured his reprehensible activities very strongly in his prayer meeting. When Tuku Mian heard of this, he

sent word that he would kill the old man in a few days. The satyagrahi Bapa, who stuck to truth, did not pay any attention to this intimidation and declared in the prayer meeting that he was prepared to face the Mian unarmed. Tuku Mian never turned up.

Hard and continuous work hastened the deterioration of Bapa's health and he had a heart attack. As soon as he recovered, he had to rush to Delhi to attend to some urgent work. When he decided to go back to Noakhali, the President of the Servants of India Society, Hridayanath Kunzru, asked him not to insist on the arduous journey. But Bapa disregarded the advice and reached Noakhali again.

He again worked fourteen hours a day, gave up shaving to save minutes and was constantly busy. It was perhaps his faith in the mission and in Gandhiji which sustained him.

XIV

The Last Days

Tapa's young brother, Dr. Keshavlal, his friend Harakhchand and others had persuaded him to leave Delhi for Bhavnagar when his health failed. Bapa said a tearful farewell to the Harijan Nivas and blessed every single worker and student there. He had developed a great attachment to the Nivas and its inmates.

For over eight months, Bapa was in Bhavnagar. His health continued to grow worse but there was no abatement in his zeal for work. His colleague from the Harijan Sevak Sangh, Ram Charan, was with him. He read out important letters to Bapa and took down replies. Bapa was constantly in touch with the Sangh activities. He regularly heard devotional songs in Hindi and Gujarati and would sometimes hum a strain or croon a song himself. (Excerpts from the *Mahabharata* and the *Yoga Vashishtha* were read out to him.)

People were worried about his health. When he was told that Purushotamdas, Kishorelal Mashruwala and Kaka Saheb Barve of Dhulia wished to come to Bhavnagar to see him, Bapa said that they should continue the good work wherever they were and they should not waste their time in coming to see him.

At the end, Bapa had a premonition that time was running out for him. He got in touch with the workers of the Bhil Seva Mandal, the Sangh and the Kasturba Trust and sent them very affectionate letters. Gradually, he became detached. He was conscious and in his senses to the last. He left this world at 8.20

p.m. on January 19, 1951. It was a Friday, the day on which Gandhiji and Sardar Patel had died.

The lamp of service that he had lit will continue to illumine the path of thousands of the servants of the people.

Appendices

Appendix-I

Adivasis of West Khandesh

My ambition and life work are fulfilled and I am happy. If I die shortly hereafter, I will not complain against the Almighty. Thank God, I have now been able to visit the Akrani Mahal area in the Taloda Taluka (West Khandesh) where the sturdy Povra and the Bhil live. The region is almost inaccessible to ordinary men, and with very little if any contact with the modern civilisation, these people are not conversant with the comforts and amenities of ordinary life.

I had been to many inaccessible places in other parts of the country, but not this one in my own province of Bombay. I have been to the Naga Hills and seen the head-hunting Nagas. I visited the Dangs and the primitive Bhils of Surat in 1919. I visited the highlands of South Orissa and Koraput, as also the Bastar State of the Central Provinces. Only last year I had a casual acquaintance with Khonds and Shavars, as also the Marias and Murias. I completed the Akrani Mahal journey in three days by the dangerous hilly road via Shahada. I had been given a motor car for the purpose.

This hilly region is in the forest region between the Narmada and the Tapti and is peopled by the Bhils and the Povras. The Povras are tall and sturdy like the Punjabis and more manly than the Bhils. But they too are subject to the evil of liquor. This evil is a gift to them from the British and some well-placed Indians in the name of civilisation. The Bhil here is more sturdy and manly than his plains' counterpart who is cowed down even

by a policeman in uniform and considers him no less dangerous than a tiger or a snake.

There is a peculiar administrative set-up in this Mahal which has only 1.5 per cent non-Adivasis, that is, a mere 250 in a population of 16,000. The Forest Department, whose main responsibility is to exploit the timber wealth of the region spreading over an area of 410 square miles, also administers the Mahal. A ranger is put in charge of revenue, excise, police, justice, education, health, and all other departments of the Government. The medical, excise and the police staff is under him, except in some technical matters.

The only government educational institution is a lone primary school with 45 students and a hostel for 15 boys at the headquarters of the Mahal, Dhadgaon. A Christian missionary runs a school at Mundalvad. The Bhil Seva Mandal of West Khandesh has set up a school at Bhagpada. There is thus only one state school, against five state liquor shops.

The Bhil is supplied with cheap liquor at his doorstep. Tea or even sweetmeats are not available here. He is law-abiding and does not distil illicit liquor. But he has earned the reputation of an incorrigible drunkard. But even he is now awake and demanding that the state liquor shops be shut down. An experienced officer who has lived among the Bhils said: 'Even in remote forest settlements I was surprised by large crowds, including women, demanding the closure of liquor shops'. He said that these communities had no chance of economic, social or moral improvement so long as they did not give up liquor. In my opinion, therefore, prohibition, if possible, should be enforced in these areas, and not in other places where individual freedom of choice is available and there is no danger of damage to the community as a whole.

Prohibition should be enforced among such hill tribes, separated as they are by nature from others, and incapable of self-improvement to better their moral tone and traits of character. This should be accompanied by publicity against drinking and by other attractions to divert their attention from liquor.

Though the Bhil speaks his own dialect, Hindu missionaries should teach him in the language of the district. Free hostels and Ashrams, on the pattern of those run by the Bhil Seva Mandal, should be opened with state aid and conducted by devoted teachers. The Bhil youth should also be taught trades like carpentry, smithy, tailoring and weaving.

Akrani Mahal is at present a land unknown to the people at large. Government servants treat it as 'an exile' when transferred here. There is no reason why the Government should not earmark a few thousands of rupees for the social, moral and economic betterment of these people, almost lost to the country. And there is no reason why some public-spirited social workers should not settle down in this area among the Povras and the Bhils. If Christian missionaries can come here from far off lands, separated by seas and oceans, and settle down for years in such solitary places, why can we of this land itself not devote ourselves to the service of this less developed fellow countryman? A party of Bhil sevaks must make this hilly tract its home and assimilate itself with the local people, learning their dialects. Only hard and sustained work and devotion for years can lift this old race up. Later, it would of course be able to stand on its own feet.

(From the *Servant of India*, June 22, 1922)

Housing the Untouchables

I have read with great interest, tempered with feelings of pain and grief, the discussion that took place in the Bombay Municipal Corporation last Monday over Mr. Karnji's motion on the subject of ejection of some relatives of Halalkhors and Bhangis residing in Municipal chawls at Valpakhady, Mazagaon. I am glad, in a way, that the Commissioner took the drastic step, presumably at the instance of his Health Department subordinates, of turning out on the street some of the relatives of Bhangi employees, bag and baggage—including a couple in one case, as admitted by the Commissioner himself, for that will force public attention on the serious disabilities that untouchable castes of Dhedhas, Bhangis and Mahars suffer in the matter of housing in Bombay. It is a patent fact that even the cultured men of these castes find insuperable difficulty in getting rooms to live in, either for love or money, even on payment of full economic rent, unless they manage to pass off as men of some touchable caste. I know of cases where even high officers of a public body like the Improvement Trust have refused rooms to very decent men of the Dhedha caste, merely because of their caste. I know of a rich Hindu landlord of Bombay being requested by no less a person than Mahatma Gandhi to erect a chawl, or at least to let out vacant land for erecting huts, for the exclusive use of these brethren, but without any result. nay more. I know of cases in which people of the Dhedha caste, driven from their villages by scarcity and poverty to the city of Bombay, are compelled against their will to accept the work of Halalkhors, though their own and their ancestral occupation was that of the weaver, merely to get a few square feet of covered space—mind you, it is no home—for themselves and their family to stretch their limbs, in Municipal Bhangi chawls. For no other landlord, whether he be a Hindu, Parsi or Moslem, would dare let out a room to a Dhedha teacher or labourer for any consideration. Even the Improvement Trust

has to let out a whole chawl—never a room or rooms in a chawl to a Mahar or a Dhedha, to a Bhangi more so, though the latter may not be doing the work of actual removal of nightsoil. Such is the public prejudice that keeps the whole caste, numbering thousands, ever degraded, and often homeless and at the mercy of the Municipal Commissioner.

But I must not let pass the opportunity of mentioning one more result of this untouchability on the morale of some of our Health Department subordinates. Now it is well known that the Municipality has not been able to build its own chawls for housing all its employees of the conservancy department, I mean sweepers and Halalkhors, even at this date. So there is constantly a dearth of living rooms for them. As soon as a new Municipal chawl is built and ready for occupation, of course, on payment of the rent charged by the Municipality, the right of occupation is regularly sold by the Inspector in charge, for a sum varying from fifty to a hundred rupees a room, and thus the Inspector, and with him some others, make a little fortune every time a new chawl is occupied. This sale does not take place by a public auction, but clandestinely through Bhangi Mukaddam, the usual agent of the Inspector, and others. Malpractices of this kind of squeezing money from poor sweepers and Halalkhors of Bombay by the inspectorial staff, are many and varied, but as they are not relevant to the subject in hand, I rest content with merely alluding to them.

In the matter of housing members of the untouchable castes, it is not only the Hindu landlords who are to blame, but Parsis and Muslims also. All are agreed in tabooing such tenants, lest their pockets should be affected. Government and philanthropists may start special schools for their children or may erect special public taps or construct wells for their benefit, but will nobody in Bombay undertake to build special chawls for them in suitable localities? Will not those nice men who endow

their thousands and lakhs in building temples, dharmashalas and sanatoria, direct their kind attention to the housing of the unfortunate brethren, from whom we take the meanest and most necessary service? Surely, Bombay is not yet barren of such businessmen who will invest their money in such a humane cause, and for the help of the downtrodden.

(From the *Servant of India*, October 16, 1924)

The Poona Pact

Whether one agrees with Mahatma Gandhi or not about the efficacy of fasting unto death as a weapon to bring about social change, his most sceptical critic will not doubt that the fast has done incalculable good to the Hindu community as a whole, or to the 'federation of Hindu communities' as Dr. Ambedkar recently described it in Bombay. It has done immense good to both parties who were signatories to the historic Poona Agreement of Saturday, the 24th September, 1932. It has awakened the conscience of the slow-moving and conservative Hindu community in a way in which it could not have done otherwise. The famous temple of Jagannath at Puri one of the famous impregnable citadels of Hindu orthodoxy, has been thrown open to the erstwhile untouchables. Progressive sons of orthodox Hindu fathers are dining publicly with so-called depressed classes, including Bhangis, who have been considered the lowest of the low, in cosmopolitan Bombay as well as in conservative Benares, in open challenge to their elders and the whole Hindu community, as if to say that they have begun the revolt against the very institution of caste. Scores of temples and public wells are being thrown open to the heretofore suppressed social workers. Men and women are giving pledges to devote themselves exclusively to the uplift work of their depressed brethren. And to crown all, Mahatma Gandhi himself has threatened to go on another fast, before his first one was broken—

we hope not a 'fast unto death'—unless the caste Hindus change their hearts completely and lift up their downtrodden brethren.

But let us consider the Agreement arrived at in its political aspect. The Communal Award of 4th August last gave the depressed classes in the eight provinces (all except N.W.F.P.) 71 seats in provincial councils in their own separate constituencies, together with the right of contesting further seats in the Hindu or so-called 'general' constituencies. This latter right would have proved shadowy, frankly speaking. We use the word shadowy deliberately, without meaning any offence to the caste Hindus. In place of these 71 seats, plus a few more doubtful seats, the depressed classes get under the Agreement 148 seats reserved for them. This is a great service that Dr. Ambedkar has done to his own section of the Hindu community, and let us add, to the whole Hindu community. If the caste Hindus have given away 25 seats, in addition to the 123 seats that Dr. Ambedkar could have fairly demanded on the population basis, i.e., in the ratio of depressed population to total Hindu population, it is but a poor recompense for the disabilities that have been imposed upon the oppressed classes for centuries past. If the whip of the Mahatma's fast has made the comparatively advanced sections of the Hindu community give away a few more seats in councils, provincial as well as central, to the depressed classes, and stirred them to undertake the collection and expenditure of a fund of 25 lakhs of rupees for their uplift, as the venerable Pandit Malaviya proclaimed in the Hindu leaders' conference in Bombay on Sunday last, we cannot say that they have done an over-generous act, but only an act that ought to have been done years ago. But it is better late than never.

Some people are likely to enquire why the proportion of depressed classes seats to Hindu seats in the Central Legislature was fixed by the Poona Agreement, when it did not form part of the Premier's Award, which was sought to be modified. It may

also be asked why franchise matters were discussed and agreed upon, before anything in that direction was decided by the R.T.C. or the British Government. The wisdom of going generally into other questions of representation in local bodies and in services, as well as of educational grants, may be questioned by others. The reply is that, once the questions were raised by Ambedkar, it would have been very impolitic on the part of Hindu leaders to refuse to consider these questions on the merely technical ground that they were 'outside the scope of the Premier's Award'. The caste Hindus, in order to show their bonafides and their perfect good faith, had to consider them and meet the wishes of the depressed classes. This has been done, and the British Government has taken note of these clauses (8 and 9) as definite pledges of the intention of the caste Hindus towards the depressed classes. This is as it should be.

The Premier has now ratified the Poona Agreement and has agreed to substitute relevant parts of it for similar parts in his own Award. The Mahatma's fast has been broken, and the whole community—suppressing and suppressed sections together—is overjoyed at the result achieved so far. Let us in all humility put in a word of warning. The Mahatma is not a man to be easily satisfied with small results obtained at a moment of national crisis and threatened disaster. He will exact strenuous and thorough work of a constructive nature from the Hindu reformers. 'There is more in common between Mahatma Gandhi and me than with any of you gathered here', was said on two occasions by Dr. Ambedkar while addressing the Hindu leaders at Bombay and Poona in recent conferences. This is too true. The Hindu community will now be put on trial, and a very crucial trial by the man of whom Mr. Sastri said at Coimbatore only on Saturday last: 'His life, it would be presumptuous to say, is lived as few lives in history or fable have been lived.'

(From the *Servant of India*, September 29, 1932)

Our Aboriginal Brethren

The population of the aborigines of our country is not a negligible figure. It is nearly two crores and a quarter and thus forms a substantial part, (6.5 per cent) of the total population of India. It is about half that of the Harijan population, which is five crores. If we can imagine the great city of Bombay to be inhabited purely by aboriginal people like the illiterate, ill-clad and poverty-stricken Bhils, Gonds and Santhals, we can have 19 such aboriginal cities. If we can transplant the whole of the aboriginal population of India to a compact area, removing all non-aborigines from the same, we can have a big province of aborigines, with a population larger than that of the present C.P. and Berar together with the State of Baroda. The aborigines are more than twice the population of Assam, or of all the Indian states in the Bombay Presidency excluding Baroda. In the Bombay Presidency, their number bears a larger proportion to the total population than in most other provinces, i.e., over 7 per cent. Aborigines in their thousands and lakhs live in Khandesh, Thana, Kolaba, Panch Mahals, North Gujarat and Nasik. The famine of 1900 drove them in thousands even to the deserts of Thar and Parkar in Sindh. Of course, aborigines are not seen in towns and railway trains, but away from the railway lines, the telegraph wire, in the hills and forests and villages, they are found in their thousands, roaming in nature's garb and subsisting on their indifferent cultivation in the forests, roots and herbs.

These people were the original sons of the soil and were in possession of this country before the Aryans pouring in from the North-West and North-East conquered them and drove them to the hills and forests from the plains. They are older and more ancient children of this soil than Hindus, and still more so than Muslims and Anglo-Indians. But they are steeped in ignorance and poverty and do not know their rights and privileges. Even a little serious thought will convince us that the problem of

improving their social, economic, moral and material conditions is urgent and pressing. How long are we to allow such a huge population as that of the Adivasis to remain illiterate and poor, living in serfdom to money-lenders and landlords? This tyrannical exploitation and loot of the Adivasis cannot continue any longer.

The main handicaps the Adivasis suffer from may be classified as poverty, illiteracy, ill-health, inaccessibility of the regions inhabited by them, defects in administration and lack of leadership.

Poverty

My belief that the Adivasis are the poorest of the Indian people, not excluding Harijans, is no exaggeration. The so-called untouchables, though suffering under many social disabilities and handicaps, have been living with us in towns and villages; they are part of our village and town life. They are always in our sight and we cannot afford to forget them by the unpleasant service of carrying nightsoil which we exact from them. We have kept them away from us as untouchables but they are amidst us and we cannot do without them. But the Adivasis are a different problem altogether. We seldom feel the existence of our aborigines. They never see the towns and cities, and rarely visit the villages. The urban people, the intelligentsia and those who minister to the religious wants of the people rarely come into contact with those whom we have called in contempt the *Kali Paraj* or the dark race. In our pride of birth and possessions we never care even to peep into their life. Neglected by the rulers—be they Hindu, Muslim or British—since time immemorial, these people still labour under very hard and primitive condition; their life is an unequal struggle against disease and exploitation by the advanced sections of the people and they always lose in their battle against those who are stronger in every way.

A very small percentage of the aborigines pursue agriculture, in an antiquated and unscientific form, and even the ordinary wooden plough is hardly ever used by them. Their mode of cultivation is to burn forests and to sow the seeds in the ashes. If the aborigine is asked to give up this form, there is resistance on his part because this has come to be part of his religious faith.

Addiction to liquor, forced labour, serfdom and the Zamindari system are contributory factors in his poverty. All these have pushed the Adivasis into an abyss of misery and privations from which it appears very difficult to extricate them.

Illiteracy

The census report for 1931 revealed that out of 76,11,803 Adivasis (for whom literacy figures had been worked out) only 44,351, or one in 172, had a smattering of the three rs. The 1921 census had shown that only four out of 1,000 Katkaris were literate, while the Bharwars had 10, Mahars 23, Bhangis 28 and Dhedhas 65 literates per thousand. In other words, the Bhangis were seven times and the Dhedhas 16 times more literate than the Adivasis. In a state of South Central India, wholly populated by aboriginal tribes, there was only one literate Bhil in every 13,000, or almost next to zero. That was in 1924 and I was pained and surprised at the situation.

A large number of schools will have to be opened to banish illiteracy among them and to give them even an elementary knowledge of the three rs. The efforts of the provincial governments and the local boards will have to be supplemented by philanthropic institutions. The spread of primary education will help the Adivasi in many ways and give him self-confidence which he now lacks. He will then be able to understand the causes of his present backwardness and work for his own improvement.

Very few teachers would be willing to work in the tribal areas, or stick to those places if they went at all, due to their inaccessibility. Teachers and workers will have to be inspired with missionary zeal and to take this work as a labour of love. Simultaneously, tribal candidates, wherever possible, will have to be trained.

The aboriginal children should be taught through the medium of the provincial language pertaining to their areas and in the script of that particular language. Generally, all tribals are also conversant with the provincial language. Only young children find it difficult to follow the provincial language. They should be taught the provincial language through the medium of the tribal dialect in the primary classes. The introduction of Roman script in the aboriginal schools, as has been done in the case of the Khasis in Assam, should be discouraged as it presents innumerable complexities and estranges the major communities, besides having many technical disadvantages.

Vocational residential schools should be opened at as many places as possible for training Adivasi children. There alone these children can be made into useful citizens. Such education must be absolutely free. Three or four years of residence in hostels will teach regular habits to these children and they will immensely benefit by the cultivation of these habits.

Educational grants made to aboriginal areas so far have been inadequate and meagre. Consequently, middle, high school and college education among the Adivasis is negligible. Very few persons among the Khasis of Assam and the Mundas and Oraons of Chhota Nagpur have received college education.

Many Christian Mission organisations and some non-Christian bodies are engaged at present in running schools for aborigines with Government aid. Commendable as their work is, it is like a drop in the ocean. Much greater efforts by such bodies

have to be made and the Government has to come forward with generous and adequate assistance to them.

Disease

The aboriginal areas are notoriously endemic in malaria which takes a very heavy toll. There are many contagious diseases prevalent there. The Adivasis of South Orissa and Madras are prey to a disease called “Koya”. The person affected by it gets ulcers all over his body, even in the most delicate parts like the tongue. It affects all, men and women, young and old, and saps their energy and ravages Adivasi life mercilessly. Ignorance is at the root of it and they go to soothsayers, exorcists, black magicians or quack vaidyas who ask them to eat leaves or roots. The state does not organise sufficient medical relief for the Adivasis. This is one of the main reasons for their ill-health. Hence, the organisation of medical relief and care is the most important welfare activity in the tribal tracts.

Inaccessibility of the Tribal Regions

Communications are very bad in aboriginal regions. There are very few motorable and all-weather roads. The Lushai Hills in Assam and Garhwal in U.P. have, for example, practically no motor roads; there are only five-foot wide bridle paths. The hilly nature of the terrain is the main cause of poor communications. Allotment of large funds for the construction and improvement of roads alone can make these regions more accessible and communication easy. Innumerable hill streams, which make even cart traffic impossible during the rains, have to be bridged.

Good roads will open up the country and encourage trade. They would attract industry to these regions, rich in minerals and natural resources. This would increase the contacts between the tribals and the advanced people. Some anthropologists and British

administrators consider their closer contact as 'dangerous' for the Adivasis, but I do not share this belief.

Defects in Administration

The areas predominantly inhabited by Adivasis are classed as "excluded" and "partially excluded" under the 1935 Government of India Act. The Montford Reforms treated these areas as "backward" and made the provisions of the Government of India Act of 1919 inapplicable to them. Before the Montford Reforms they were scheduled districts under an Act of 1874.

Under the present Constitution, there are eight 'excluded' and 28 'partially excluded' areas with a population of 1.5 crores. The administration of the excluded areas is controlled and directed exclusively by the governor of the province concerned, while that of the partially excluded areas is controlled largely by the governor, who has been given 'special responsibilities' in their case. No legislative enactment applies to either of these areas, unless the governor so directs through a special notification.

The administration obtaining in these areas is autocratic. All powers are concentrated in the hands of a few officials. The executive and judicial powers are vested in one and the same officer. Even a subject like education is under him. Such officers are also chairmen of union, taluka and district boards. How can any administration be efficient or popular when so many powers and functions are the charge of a single officer?

Lack of Leadership

Lack of leadership in the tribal communities is a great handicap. There are a few educated people among the Adivasis who have embraced Christianity, as in Chhota Nagpur, but they are generally interested only in Christian aborigines rather than in their non-Christian brethren. Leaders in the non-Christian sections

are fewer still. This is one of the reasons why the aboriginal interests fail to receive proper attention from the authorities and the general public. Till the aboriginals are capable of standing on their own legs and fighting for their rights, non-Adivasi social reformers will have to undertake this responsibility with missionary zeal and work for their educational and economic uplift.

(From an address read out in Poona in 1941)

V. R. Shinde

Mr. V. R. Shinde died recently after several years of continued paralytic attacks. During the last fifteen years he was not active, being bed-ridden and so out of the public gaze.

He was one of my four gurus and, next to my father, I took my lessons in public welfare work at his feet. Though younger in age to me, he was far advanced in the study of national beneficent activities. It is well-known that he was the father of the depressed classes welfare movement on Bombay-side, and he was the first man and a pioneer in this field except in the Punjab and U.P. in recent times. I took my first lessons in practical work from him. After a lapse of 40 years, I have not forgotten the vivid description that he gave me of a Buddhist Bhikshu of Irish origin, and of his inimitable humility and piety, standing at his door, in the Bombay Prarthana Samaj building one early morning. When I was in Bombay Municipal service and in charge of the *kuchra* unloading works, in about the years 1906 and 1907, with two or three hundred Mahars and Mangs doing the filthiest work, perhaps more insanitary than the carrying of nightsoil by Bhangis, he gave me lessons in how to conduct schools for their children and to obtain as many privileges as I could for these humble low class workmen of the city of Bombay.

When a technical drafting error that was detected in the Bombay Municipal Act of 1888 prevented the Corporation of Bombay from sanctioning the grant for a school I had started for its employees, he managed to get me the funds through some friendly Corporation member.

Years rolled by, and Sir N. G. Chandavarkar led a group of workers on the path of service to the Harijans, with Shinde as the working secretary.

Neither the Government of India nor the subordinate governments of the provinces of those days were awakened to their sense of duty to the humblest and the oppressed. The Labour Department of Madras which has been in the vanguard in this kind of public service and provided an object lesson to other provincial governments, was not even then born. Thank God, it has flourished and spends about Rs. 10 to 12 lakhs a year.

This is not a very creditable percentage, even less than one per cent. However, other Governments have not come up even to that stage yet, in spite of greatly added resources.

Temperamental differences divided the President and the Secretary of the Depressed Classes Mission after some time, but Shinde continued to carry out his missionary task at four different places, Bombay, Poona, Dharwar and Nagpur, mostly in the Marathi area. I very well remember how he coaxed me to speak at a small meeting in the small state of Kathiawar in the year 1908 for the first time in my life. He encouraged me by complimenting me on the Gujarat speech I had then made.

In the later twenties of this century, Shinde was out of action. Thereafter came Gandhiji's famous movement and the whirlwind Harijan tour in 1933 and 1934 for 270 days continuously for the service of Harijans in the whole country and for the removal of untouchability from Hindu society. But that is another story.

He was an ill paid missionary, but carrying on his mission all the same with unabated enthusiasm. He lived to the end in voluntary poverty with a small family. His widowed sister was also trained in this missionary work and she has survived him. He could ill educate his sons, one of whom managed to maintain him in his declining years.

The younger generation knows very little of Shinde. He was a far-sighted man with the lofty mission of bringing long-denied justice to five crore persons about one-sixth of Indian humanity. In his time there was hardly any group of workers in the country for social service activities, particularly for our neglected and suppressed people. May his life be an inspiration to the new generation of field workers in social service. May his soul rest in peace and be one with the Almighty, who had endowed him with a noble mission and put in his hand a torch for the regeneration of a not inconsiderable part of our nation.

(From *Indian Social Reformer*, April 8, 1944)

Leprosy Relief Work

It gives me great pleasure to accept the work of opening this Conference, a task which our friend Jajuji has entrusted me with. When I received his telegram, I hesitated, I thought a doctor engaged in the relief of leprosy should be in that place and not I. But I accepted it in the hope that this cause of leprosy relief will get an impetus not by my speaking to you on the opening of this Conference, but by the vast and influential congregation of people assembled here.

A word of gratitude is due to my Guru in this particular line of service—I mean the Mission to Lepers. It is the mission that has been working all the world over for over 75 years, and for nearly 20 years I followed the Annual Report of the same with very great love and admiration, waiting for the day when our own

people, I mean the Indians, will take up the work. And it is no small satisfaction to me to tell you that the day has arrived.

India is now free from the foreign yoke, and can solve her problems, for good or bad, as she likes. And with the help of you all, the old workers in the field and the new workers, the work can be done much better. I can say without the least doubt of contradiction that this is the first popular Conference of its kind. It is the one wherein the experts and the laymen have assembled to work in a common cause.

The work is chiefly for the experts, no doubt, but the services of laymen like myself are as much necessary, if not more, in this cause, which is aptly described as the disease shunned by the people like plague. It is hated by them. Moving in the streets of Bombay, the busy Bombay, and looking at the large number of beggars with leprosy, I could not but pay some attention to them, and paid occasional visits to the Acworth Leper Home in Matunga.

These workers should go around the country, make propaganda and tell the people that it is not an incurable disease, which is the general impression unfortunately. The public do not know that only about 20 per cent of the people affected by the disease are infective, the remaining 80 per cent being non-infective. In that way the laymen can do a lot, and the services of my friend Jagadisan have done much in the South in this direction.

This disease is so feared by the people that when in the draft of the Kasturba Trust I interpolated the service of women and children with leprosy, somebody looked up with horror and remarked 'What, Kasturba Trust, and leprosy in that'!

'Yes', I said, 'this is one of the diseases which affects our women and children'.

Fortunately, as you know, Gandhiji has introduced it as one of the 18 items in the constructive programme. So in addition to the 70 or so institutions for the cure or relief of leprosy started by the Mission to Lepers, I hope there will now be a large number of small hospitals, asylums or homes for lepers.

There are two schools of thought, as far as I know, for the relief of leprosy sufferers. One believes in large hospitals, and large homes, accommodating 500 or even 1,000 people afflicted by leprosy, and the other believes in small homes dispersed over the villages, small villages, and being taken care of by the village doctors and particular attention, personal attention, being given to these people. This is a matter for experts to decide. The only thing I wish to say is that leprosy is a village disease, not a town disease like tuberculosis. It is not created in the industrial factories of our country. It exists in the villages more than in large towns and cities. So they should be treated in the villages rather than in large towns and cities like the one in Purulia of which I am reminded by the presence in our midst of Mr. Donald Miller, the Secretary of the Mission to Lepers. Yes, in Purulia, there is a large centre treating about 1,000 patients, and another of a later growth with accommodation for 200 or 300 patients. The country requires a large number of small hospitals dispersed all over. If at the conclusion of this Conference, we find twice, we should consider evolving an indigenous organisation on the lines of the Mission to Lepers or the British Empire Leprosy Relief Association (B.E.L.R.A.) which should work in cooperation with these two.

We want a large army of workers in this work. Unless there are capable men who will be in charge of small leprosy centres, and in villages, they cannot be run efficiently. Unless discipline is exacted from patients in their charge, these village centres will not be able to do their allotted work. So a large number of medical and non-medical workers are necessary for

that. Of course, it is the work of people who will not be known to the public. But we want a large number of laymen with missionary spirit and I hope they will come forward in due course.

Such an organisation must come from non-official sources. Of course, Governments will be there to support them. But we should hope to run it completely non-officially like the Mission to Lepers and the B.E.L.R.A.

(Speech inaugurating the first All India Leprosy Workers' Conference at Wardha, November 30, 1947)

Social Uplift of Bedias

During my tour in Bundelkhand (Vindhya Pradesh) I came to Bijawar, a town of about 10,000 souls, on the morning of May 1, 1949. After going round the streets inhabited by Sweepers, Basors, Chamars and after inspecting a Harijan lower primary school, my party was taken to a street inhabited by a caste known as Bedias. This caste is not very numerous and is to be found at a few places on this side. This street has 8 families consisting of 21 men, 34 women, 8 boys and 10 girls total 73).

During my visit to the locality of Sweepers, Chamars, Basors etc., I had no difficulty in getting information about their ways of living, their profession, their wages and their social condition. But in this locality, it took some time to gather together the men and women of the locality. The women were the first to come and the men could only be gathered with a little difficulty.

The first question put to the eight or ten men after they had assembled was about their profession. We were first told that they cultivated the lands given to them by the State, but this proved to be incorrect. They said that they had no land to cultivate and the one field including a well that was given to one of them had passed off from their hands to the jagirdar of the

village. A young woman then brought forward a Government stamped paper which proved to be a lease of land given to her old father, who was also present. But this land too was taken away from the family by the jagirdar.

I soon received the correct answer about the profession, when an old man told the party very frankly that, besides ordinary labour, We are living upon the money earned by our sisters and daughters—meaning thereby prostitution. The want of ordinary modesty common among women of other classes, and their boldness showed that the women were more forward and advanced than the men. They were the spokesmen of the small gathering. When we pressed upon the gathering that the profession that the caste was following should be left by them in favour of more decent manual work, the young lady who was in possession of the lease of land, told us her story. She said in a complaining tone that though she had proposed some time back to marry a willing Brahmin, the matter was reported to the police and the *thanedar* (Sub-Inspector of Police) did not approve of the marriage and banned it. ‘I was willing to marry and lead an honest domestic life but I was not allowed to do so by the almighty police department’. She added, ‘There are many others like myself who are willing to lead a settled life but we are unable to do so for no fault of ours. We are compelled to lead the life we are traditionally living. If you enable us to get settled in life and give our menfolk some lands to cultivate and earn their living from the same, we are ready to live like other people.’

Our local friends, officials and non-officials said very frankly that this was the first time that they came across this caste and its degraded social condition. They said, ‘We are doing our routine work of courts and offices—of Congress and Praja Mandal, and of holding conferences and organizing agitations; but we never knew this problem, which exists in our own locality and is no doubt a disgrace to the society of which the Bedias form a part’.

Out of the 34 women, about 25 lived as prostitutes. Will not social servants take up the work of reforming these women? There is a class of such women in Karnatak, going by the name of Devadasis. Shri Kaka Karkhanis, one of our senior and seasoned Harijan workers, undertook some years back to educate such Devadasi girls and also admitted them into ordinary Harijan girls' hostel in the city of Bijapur, Bombay Province. He has been successful in educating and sending forth in the world as honourable women 10 girls since 1938 and some of them are school teachers.

(From the *Harijan*, June 7, 1949)

Appendix-II

Bapa's Diary

Writing in the *Harijan Bandhu* on January 20, 1933, on the importance of keeping a regular diary, Mahatma Gandhi said:

“A diary acts as a guard for one who worships truth; nothing but truth has to be entered there; if one has been lazy, there is no escape from mentioning it; if one has been active, then too there is no getting away from jotting it down; a diary thus keeps all one's actions under surveillance. It is therefore necessary that everybody understands its importance. Once we start maintaining a regular diary, we begin to understand what and how to write. But there is one condition. We will have to be truthful. Without this a diary is like base coin. But if it is truthful, it is as precious as gold.

There should be no let-up in keeping a diary once it is accepted as a regular practice. The advantage would be obvious later, if not immediately. This habit alone will save us from many vices, since the diary will be a witness to our vices. If a wrong has been committed it must find a place in the diary; it is not necessary to comment on it; criticism would, of course, come in the shape of filling the blanks. It is enough to mention that you lost your temper on A or cheated B. It is not necessary to add 'it was very bad of me to have done so; let there be no repetition

of this.' Nor should one's own praises find any place in a diary. A bare mention of the work done and the faults committed is enough. There should be no reference to others' faults. Diaries are a restraint which contributes to self-purification".

On this subject of keeping a regular diary, Vinoba wrote in the *Harijan* of February 23, 1947:

"I would like to draw the attention of village-workers to a defect which has come to my notice. Very few of them keep a regular diary. This is not good. It must become a part of their daily routine. It must briefly record the work done during the day and the worker's experience, retrospection and introspection—daily or periodical—material as well as spiritual. It is not expected to take the shape of an article or literary writing.

Writing is one of the external means which promotes thinking. I have seen several workers who do a good deal of hard work and yet make no improvement or progress in it. The reason is that they never do any thinking. Some of them feel that thinking is a pastime for the idle and the un-energetic. Those who work do not need to waste their time on chewing thought. This attitude itself indicates the under-development of the intellect which cannot even understand the necessity of thinking.

It was the result of thinking that first prompted the worker to take to village service. But after having taken to it and started it according to his light at that time, he gave up thinking further for himself. The result was that he ceased to make progress. One

cannot expand or improve one's business on old capital alone. So also in other spheres of work. As Buddha has said, 'The house must be cleaned and arranged everyday; so also the mind.' You must think anew and study new things everyday.

Gandhiji is seen initiating new schemes and methods everyday. He has always something fresh to say on the various problems. It is so, because he thinks, takes a retrospect and makes introspection everyday. But some of the workers do not read even Gandhiji's writings. This is very regrettable.

Every worker who wants to serve intelligently and progressively must regularly set apart some time both for study and thinking for himself. For the latter, keeping a regular diary is a helpful means. It will quickly show excellent results".

While Gandhiji and Vinoba attached greater importance to keeping a regular diary, Gokhale thought otherwise. He never kept a diary himself, nor did he ask others to do so. Why did Bapa, who was a member of the Society founded by Gokhale, keep it?

Srinivasa Shastri explained the reason when he said: "A great political discontent pervaded the country when our Society was established. The Government kept an eye on the activities of every youth and secret inquiries were conducted against almost everyone. In many political cases, the charges against the accused were established with the help of their diaries. Gokhale told us that if we keep regular diaries we might implicate other public workers even if we were innocent. He did not, therefore, approve of maintaining diaries".

But this did not apply to Bapa. He was no political worker. Times had also changed since the days of Gokhale. Bapa not only

kept a diary, but considered it a necessary medium in the search of truth.

Bapa started keeping a regular diary in 1924 and kept up the habit till the last. He would note down every night the day's activities and his feelings about things. If he missed it one day, he would fill the gap the next day, or would dictate the entry to somebody else, who entered it in his diary. There was seldom any break in this routine. Till 1942 he maintained it in Gujarati. Then till 1946 he wrote it in English, either in his own hand or with the aid of an amanuensis.

Poetic feelings or descriptions of scenic beauty had no place in his diary. The entries are a record of incessant and devoted activity in simple words. He never missed facts and figures, so necessary for a devotee of truth. A few pages from his diary are therefore reproduced here.

XXX

September 25, 1924

Nadiad. General meeting of the Antyaj Seva Mandal—at night; drama for the benefit of the Bhil Seva Mandal.

Got up at 5-30; ablutions. Left at 6-15. Went with Trambaklal to his house in Madalpur (in Ahmedabad). On the way to the station, he accompanied me up to Bhadra by bus.

From Ahmedabad to Nadiad by Express. Read yesterday's *Praja Mitra* and today's *Times*:

Examined the accounts of Parikshitlal. Decided to get forms printed. Examined the sale-deed of the piece of land at Navsari. Bath and lunch. Every one had lunch here.

Wrote diaries of the previous two days and of today upto noon. Bakorbhai and Chunilal Vyas came by noon-train. Meeting began at one.

Meeting from 1 to 5. Everything went on smoothly. Budgets were framed and passed. Framed the Constitution. Decided where to open schools. Heard in private the petty quarrels of two teachers of Mansa.

To the station on foot. For Baroda by local passenger train. Manilal Kashiwala of Vaghodia met me in the train. Reached Baroda at 8. Went on foot to Motibhai, carrying a bundle of my luggage. Lakshmidas from Dohad arrived by Express. 34 students of Vaso School also arrived.

Four of us—Motibhai, Laxmidas, Ambaram and myself—went to the theatre in a tonga. Drama of *Shankit Hridaya* was performed. The Dewan Saheb had graced the occasion. I said a few words and expressed thanks. The Dewan Saheb gave a very good and courteous reply. I garlanded him and the Prince of Sant Rampur. Sat till the drama was over.

Went home at 2 a.m. in a tonga.

XXX

(A page from the diary during his tour in C.P. for studying the problems of the aborigines of the province who number more than 30 lakhs.)

February 8, 1926. (Mandla to Patpara—seven miles and back) Up at 6-30. Ablutions and tea.

Inquired from Umesh Dutt about going to Patpara at noon. He advised me to go to Patpara in the morning so that the school can be visited. Went to Umesh Dutt's place. His brother accompanied me. Hired a car at Rs. 5 from a garage, adjacent to the market.

On the way met three or four bullock caravans, coming from Dindori carrying grain. They return to Dindori with salt, tobacco, etc. It is 64 miles from Mandla. On the way was a

pucca building of one Malguzar. Huts of Ahirs were either thatched with grass or tiled.

Met Hodgkinson of the Church Mission Society. Had a good talk with him. He worked for 13 years at one centre in Idar State (Gujarat) and is working for another 13 years among the Gonds. Visited boys' school, girls' school, two separate hostels for boys and girls, a dispensary, church and an asylum for those afflicted with leprosy.

The girls' school presented a very neat and tidy appearance. The girls are very clean and are of advanced age.

Five men and seven women leprosy patients. One has become blind.

Returned at 11. Bath and lunch.

Read the *Times* and *The Daily Mail* of Saturday. Wrote in a note-book the report of Patpara. Read chapters from C.P. Census Report of 1911 and 1921 on Animists and Christians. Marked important portions with pencil. Went to see Ganesh Dutt at 5 to gather information on cooperation. He was not at home. Read a little from the Land Revenue Code. Umesh Dutt was examining one woman witness. Went to the club after half an hour.

Read *Hitavada* in the club. A portion of the Bhil Memorial has appeared in it. Umesh Dutt came there. Learnt from him how the Gond Malguzars lost their land and villages. The Malguzars of Ghughari and Mókas lost everything in the 1857 rebellion. He narrated instances of cheating and obtaining court decrees without serving the summons. The Land Alienation Act of 1916 enacted mainly through the efforts of Russell does not give proper protection. Though the villages cannot be alienated, they can be given on lease for a maximum period of 20 years.

Went to Umesh Dutt after supper. Got information about cooperative societies.

Wrote diary. To bed at 10.30.

xxx

February, 15, 1926

[From Pithora to Saraipali (34 miles)—From Saraipali to Shingoda (12 miles)]

Up at 6. Ablutions. Ready after tea and toast. Mangal-Murti went out for a walk. On my request to keep the manager with me for some time, he took the assistant manager with him and asked Bhargave (manager) to remain with me.

He is the manager of two zamindaris of 100 villages, having an income of about a lakh and a quarter rupees.

There are 12 schools in these zamindaris. A building for a hostel has been constructed; he will spend Rs. 180 per month from October towards scholarships to the students. One Gond boy studying in IV English at Raipur is a recipient of scholarship. Brahmin and Kisan students receive scholarships.

There are Gonds, Savers, Binjwars, Bhunjias, Pankas and other aboriginal tribes in the zamindaris. A great quantity of quinine is sold at the post office. It is a malaria-ridden place.

Called the teacher of the school. He told me that instead of giving scholarships for books or clothes it would be more desirable to give Rs. 2 or Rs. 3 per month to the parents for attracting more boys to the school. The number on the roll is 136, out of which 30 are aborigines.

Visited the boarding. Foundation of the well is in sand, so it cannot be deepened.

Started at 8 by car. The road leads through forest. Covered 34 miles from 62nd mile to 96th mile. On the way the luggage carrier became loose. Had to tie it up with a rope.

Lodged at the guest-house at Saraipali. Could not have a bath. Barber was not available. Lunch. Got some rest. Read about Binjwars and Agarias from 'Tribes and Castes'. Read some bits from the history of the Maharaja of Raj Gond. It was late as the loose carrier was being adjusted. Started at 5. Reached Shingoda, but went up further. Took the car back and came near the police outpost.

From there came to P.W.D. bungalow in the dark by a very bad road. There was good accommodation in the bungalow. After supper, talked up to 10. R. K.Nehru's thinking is clear, keen and of a superior type. He is an advocate of western civilization. Very clever in talk.

Wrote diary. Read about Kolta. To bed at 11.

It was arranged to return to Saraipali last evening. But reached Saraipali today at 11. We had to reach Kalanda today in the evening, which is 5 to 6 miles away from the road. But it will be reached tomorrow morning.

XXX

February 20, 1926

(To Raipur from Dhamtari) Up early in the morning. Ablutions.

Went with Vinayak for hiring a tonga on the tank. There met Bawa (Sadhu) Agandevji. He holds progressive views. He tries to uplift depressed classes like Teli, Bhoi, Baya Mahar, Jheri Mahar, Rout, etc.

He distributes medicines and knows other sanyasis doing social work. Started in tonga with Narayanrao and Padole.

On the way to Kanker, at a distance of four and a half miles, there is a leprosy asylum. Met the doctor of the asylum. Buildings are being constructed for the last two years. Roof of the church is under construction. Dr. C. D. Esch was supervising the flooring. One lakh rupees have been spent on the buildings. The Government has given half of it as grant and the remaining half has been contributed by the Mission to Lepers. Doctor told me that the monthly expenditure per patient comes to Rs. 7. The Government gives Rs. 3 as grant per month per patient. The rest is met by the Mission. Saw five patients who were inoculated. I requested him to train one of my workers and to send him to Dr. Muir at Calcutta for further training. He himself has been trained by Dr. Muir. After return, bath and lunch.

Girjashanker Vaidya, retired Range Officer—met me. Had a talk with him. Though a native of Surat District, he intends to stay here for five to seven years. After lunch went to Narayanrao's. Asked him to write a letter to Shyamlal Som.

I wrote my diary for yesterday and for today up to noon. To the station at 11. Left Raipur for Nagpur.

XXX

June, 7, 1928

Regarding Flood-Relief Work in Gujarat

(To Mogar, Asodar, Bodal, Borsad, Vachhial, Dehewan, Badalpur, Kathana, Jantral, Virsad, Dharmaj, and night-halt at Petlad.)

Up at 5.30. Ready at 6 after ablutions. The car which was hired at Rs. 25 did not come at 6 as was fixed but at 7.30. Waited for it, sitting in a verandah of the house of a Dharala (an intermediate class community in Kaira District). Harivallabhadas gave a piece of advice to Narsinghbhai.

Started at 7.30. Took Narsinghbhai with us up to railway-crossing on the way to Mogar.

Inspected the well of Christian Dhedhas (untouchable caste in Gujarat). The wooden curb is a little deviated. Got it examined by a workman. Told them that they will be supplied with 12 bags of cement and labour charges of a mason. Dahyabhai agreed to supervise the construction of the well.

Went to Asodar. On the way were two villages of Khadol and Vadod. At Vadod inspected a Roman Catholic Church well of Dhedhas (Harijans). At Asodar, brick lining of about 10 feet in the well of Harijans has been constructed above the curb. The inside diameter is 10 ft. 5 in. An arrangement for excavation charges at Rs. 3 per day has been made with Bhois.

Reached Bodal. Went to Daol with Ambalal for inspection of wells of Bhangis and Dhedhas. Bricks at a rate of Rs. 12 to Rs. 13 per thousand are purchased. The rate is a little high. The brick-lining of the well of Dhedhas has reached the surface.

Back to Bodal Ashram. Bath and lunch.

Motibhai Amin came. Rest from 1.15 to 2.15 in a small room. Started at 2.30. Saw the dharmashala under repairs. Passing through Daol, crossing Borsad from one end to the other, reached Nachhival via Kasari. It is inhabited wholly by poor Dharalas. The number of houses is about 200. Saw the village well which is totally damaged. The village people agreed to collect Rs. 400 for its repairs. The mukhiya (patel) was present.

Waited for a while at the house of Bhangis at Kathor. Harivadan was inquiring at every village about the wells of Harijans. Reached Badalpur via Gorwa and Dehewan. Inspected a well of Harijans.

Rebuked Raghunath Dolaji for charging higher rate for bricks. Saw the accounts from his son who was called from the

brick kiln. According to his accounts the rate comes to Rs. 10 per thousand. Met overseer Shivabhai and Mohansingh Parmar. Inspected the school building of which the roof is being reconstructed and one well is rebuilt. The building is without plinth. Inspected two village wells of Solanki Pati and Parmar Pati. Solankis have done it by their own labour.

Reached Kathana. Taking Harilal and the school-master with me, inspected the school building. Saw the plaster work on the backwall.

We had to reach Petlad somehow. The chauffeur hesitatingly and reluctantly brought us to Petlad. Arrived at 10.30 at Chandubhai's Sanatorium. Supper and to bed totally exhausted at 12.

XXX

October 24, 1929

Tour in Thana District.

(From Jawhar to Mokhada, Kasara, Khardi, Shapur and Kalyan)

Up at 5.30, ablutions and hot water bath. Milk. Jagjiwan and Vagholikar came to see me.

Went to see Gune (formerly Karbhari of the State and now the Administrator). Told him about the scarcity of water in the State. Discussed with him affairs of the boarding house.

Visited the hostel. There are 12 boarders: 1 Thakur, 4 Konkarnas and 7 Kolis. There is no Varli student. One who was admitted has run away.

Mokhada is 14 miles from Jawhar. The road is hilly and winding. The tract is beautiful. The visitors who go to Europe for pleasure trip should come here and enjoy the beautiful scenery.

Visited the boarding of 15 students in Mokhada. It is a matter of satisfaction that there are 8 Varli boys here. One is a Thakur. Talks with Malhar Kolis, Kathodis and Mahars and Bhangi employees of the dispensary.

From Mokhada to Khodale—15 miles. Road is hilly, but the tract is very beautiful. Visited a separate school for Mahars. Distributed clothes-dhoties of the District Local Board. From Khodale, Kasara is 15 miles. Agra Road at the 6th mile. The road is wide and goes touching the hills. Did not stop at Kasara but went to Khardi. There is a school and boarding for Mahars. There are 30 boarders in the hostel and 40 in the school. Visited the school for Mahar girls. The mistress of the school—Mahar by caste—seemed to be very decent. Took milk at the Patel's house. Rested at a Konkani Muslim's place in Vasind. To the station. The cars sent to Thana. Reached Kalyan by train. Put up at Sankerrao's place. Wrote the report up to 10 and dictated a page to typist.

To bed at 10.15

xxx

February 27, 1930

[A Red Letter Day—Opening of an Ashram in Nagar Parker (Sind)]

Got up late in the morning. Ablutions and milk. Spent the whole morning in disposal of correspondence and office work. Sent telegrams to Devdhar at Poona, to Amritlal Sheth at Ranpur (Kathiawar) and to Bavaji Shankerbhai at Hariji (regarding price of foodgrains required for flood relief), but as telegraphic line was out of order they were not despatched. So wrote letters to Amritlal Sheth that I could not accept the editorship of *Saurashtra* (weekly), to Parikshitlal regarding an application from

Nadiad and to Hariji for sending prices of foodgrains to Swami Krishnanand, Lakshmidas and Ramanlal.

Spent half an hour in the Ashram and wrote the names and other particulars of students to be admitted. Asked to get themselves dressed and be ready. Admitted eleven in the Ashram. Two were admitted in the afternoon thus making a total of 13 of whom one is Bhil, 5 are Kolis and 7 Meghwals. No girl has come for admission.

Heard from the Sub-Inspector of Police the story of a Bhil being abducted by a Muslim. Many such incidents occur in Sind. It requires serious attention.

Bath and lunch at 1. Rest upto 3.30 or 4. Read Malkani's monograph on salt.

Wrote letters and despatched them before 6.

The function of the opening ceremony of the Ashram began at about 5.30 p.m. The high caste (Savarna) Hindus were sitting closely with Bhils, Kolis and Meghwals. The Mukhtyar, the Sub-Inspector of Police and others attended the function. Jairamdas, Swami and others spoke. I think it will have a great effect in favour of untouchables. The function ended at 7.15. Thirteen boys were shown in uniform dress to the gathering. Mrs. Hira held prayers and sang Vande-Mataram. I wish the seed sown may blossom into a big tree and many spring up from one by the grace of God. Today is a red letter day. Message of Bapu was read before the audience.

Arrangement for food was made for the Bhils and Meghwals who had come from villages. At noon food was cooked in the dharmashala, and in the evening it was cooked in the Ashram.

Supper at Shanti's house. Returned to Ashram. Heard Bhajans of Bhils. Jairamdas discussed with them their social

problems. The Bhils requested that a worker be deputed to their villages. They agreed to send their children to the Ashram after the visit of the worker.

To bed 10.30.

xxx

September 28, 1932

In Poona

[Talks with Chakravarti Rajagopalachari]

Stayed in the Society for the whole morning, as Rajaji and Rajendra Babu were to come to see Hariji and me. Had phoned to them in the morning for fixing appointment.

Phoned to Lady Thackersey apologizing for inconvenience to Gurudev (Rabindranath Tagore) at the meeting in Shivaji Mandir last night owing to a little disturbance.

Kodand, Hariji, and myself sent a telegram to Shastriji requesting him to come to Poona immediately. Received his reply in the evening that he had become very weak; if there was no alternative, he would start. Thought of calling Jayakar, but decided to contact him by phone after watching the trend of discussion up to the evening. Hariji discussed two articles of Kodand—one on Communal Award and the second on the fast of Gandhiji. He was convinced that Gandhiji's thinking was not proper and that was a little hasty. After lunch, worked out figures for seats of the three communities of the Punjab according to their populations.

Hariji held discussions with Rajaji and Rajendra Babu from 1.30 to 2.45. Rajaji's proposal for immediate Provincial Autonomy without a Bill to be passed in the Parliament seemed a little strange. It is impossible for the Liberals to propose such a thing.

Went in the car of Kale to Jail at 3.30. Had to wait for more than an hour at two places—firstly at a distance of two furlongs from the jail and secondly at the gate. Went in at 5. Navale, Rajbhoj and Dalpatram met at the gate. Dalpatram had come to hand over fruits.

Colonel Bhandari came out at 5. So we could get in, otherwise it would not have been possible. Hariji talked with Bapu in private for half an hour. Bapu, leaving aside all the work, dictated a message to Rajbhoj and gave it to him. This is real love for Harijans.

Kunzru and myself had a talk with Vallabhbhai. Government is not honest in its dealings. Discussed whether Jayakar should be called. Bapu requested Malviyaji to go to Calicut for Kelappan. He could not make up his mind as his health was not good. Home at 8. Hariji discussed with Rajaji while at dinner but to no end. My article has been published in the *Servant of India*.

xxx

October 25, 1933

In Delhi

(Visited Basti Harphul in the evening, a dirty locality in Sadar Bagar)

Awoke before 3 a.m., but did not get up before 4. Wrote four letters in Gujarati: (1) to Harakhchand regarding flood relief in Orissa—distribution of rice of one pice per day; (2) to Magan at Thana Devli regarding his marriage; (3) to Chandrashanker at Wardha regarding publishing news of (Orissa famine in the Harijan, and (4) to Ramjibhai asking him remain present at the marriage of Magan and to persuade his father-in-law to spend less on the marriage.

Read *Hindustan Times* and *Bombay Times*. Went to the office at 8.

Daulatrai and Tansukhrai came from Rohtak. Talked about their work. Got figures of 100 more villages. There is comparatively very little damage in twenty of them. Had an article against Harijan Sevak Sangh that appeared in an Urdu paper of Rohtak read out. Arranged for medicines for them through Vaidyaji. Purchased 50 'thans' of cloth, each Rs. 6, and 14 maunds of cotton, at Rs. 10 per maund, from the mill and arranged to send them.

Both went at 1, after seeing me at the Kothi (residence). Was drowsy but did not sleep. Went to the office at 2. Did not go to Birlaji. Examined the budget of Andhra. Got a letter regarding notes on budget typed and despatched it. Signed M.Os. from 5 to 7 in the morning. Sent Rs. 90 to C. Dharmalingam, a student of Veterinary College of Madras.

Talked to Ramprasad of Delhi Board regarding work to be done at the time of Gandhiji's visit to Delhi. Did office work up to 5.30, thereafter went with Ramprasad to see 'Harphul Basti' in Sadar Bazar. Very dirty and narrow lanes having drains in the middle, no light at night. Lanes at some places very narrow, hardly three feet in width, and drains in the middle. About 4,000 houses. Municipality has resolved to purchase the whole area, but the resolution has not been put into effect. Though many houses have fallen, permission is not given to rebuild them. At one place a wall has been erected in a lane, thus the width of the lane has been reduced to a half. This is the condition in the capital of India—a gorgeous city.

Received two fixed deposit receipts of the funds of Gujarati Samaj from.... But they are of no use as they are in his name. Are they merchants or thieves? The receipts can be transferred to the names of the Trustees if they are selected

Read some portions from Census Volume of Central India Agency. Supper and wrote diary. Received a telegram from Gandhiji to persuade Deela and send her to Wardha. To bed at 9.

XXX

July 13, 1934

In Lahore

Passed morning in quiet after yesterday's and night's disturbances and harassment. But Bapu had to suffer from loud noises of crowds—'Mahatmaji, Darshan Do' from 5.30 to 9.

Attended the prayer in the morning. Afterwards did not sleep. From 8 to 9, Harijan Sangh deputations from six districts, namely, Bannu, Abbottabad, Ambala, Ludhiana, Gurdaspur and Rawalpindi waited on Bapu. Each of them presented a purse. Report of each has been received; discussion on each report. From 9 to 10.30 gave replies to questions put by persons coming to see Bapu. Persons from Bhola Company came to request Bapu to spend silence day at their place. Model Town people came in the afternoon with a similar request.

Discussion with Kaka Saheb and Devidas to request Bapu to take more rest. After lunch, dictated letter for arranging Kanpur programme, and arranged programme of four hours' work a day. Had a good sleep upto 3.15. 4 to 5 p.m., deputation No. 1 of Harijans regarding Harijan Sangh. Bapu gave an appropriate reply to their written statement. 5 to 6, deputation of Sanatan Dharma Pratinidhi Sabha. They gave an account of Sabha's work. We were told that they were working in collaboration with Harijan Sevak Sangh. Discussion with them, regarding six questions put by them. Goswami Ganesh Dutt was the chief among them.

After supper went with Bapu to the meeting of students of college and school. Some portion of the meeting ground meant for students was occupied by a crowd which created disturbance in the morning. But no disturbance occurred in the meeting. The people in front of the loudspeaker heard distinctly, while those in the rear did not hear; and so there was some noise.

Prayers held in the hall where Bapu was staying. Discussed with Bapu whether any change in the programme of 4 hours for work should be made. No curtailment in the total number of days.

He agreed to spend silence day at some other suitable place. Saw the place by going in Gopichand's car. Returned at 10.30 and to bed.

XXX

July 21, 1934

(Third day in Calcutta. Very busy day. Left for Allahabad and Kanpur at night.)

Took part in prayers at 4 in the morning; did not sleep afterwards, as, it was arranged to start work immediately after prayers.

It was decided to go to Suresh Banerjee on foot but as it was late, went in a car. On the way, Bapu went to Mrs. Sen Gupta's residence. Then to Suresh Banerjee's residence. He has removed the jacket of Plaster of Paris. He has gathered labourers. Had arranged a meeting of women. Bapu refused to go there and rebuked Ananda Babu. Went to see Harijan quarters at two places. Saw the Bhangi huts which are very bad.

Went to the Ashram of Satish Babu. Rent of Rs. 45. There is a dispensary attached to it. There is a settlement of the poor. Bapu went at 8 to perform opening ceremony of a wing of Seva

Sadan. All 'Bhadra Lok'. Nil Ratna Sarkar delivered a very long speech. Went to Mulji Sikka. Breakfast. His family members presented Bapu money, which came to Rs. 1,044.

Came to residence. Bapu saw groups of (1) students, (2) Harijan leaders, and (3) socialists, each of them in a separate room.

One hour in shaving, bath and lunch.

At noon could not take a minute's rest; had to settle account of collections.

Left residence at 4. Went to Kanoria. As his son had recently expired, his wife could not go out; therefore Gandhiji was invited to his place. Bapu was presented with heaps of coins. Total more than two thousand.

Went at 4.30 to the Corporation. Presentation of address to Bapu. I got separated from Bapu there. Could hear from a distance. In the middle I left and sat in a car with 'Kaka'. Hall was very long like a strip of 'Langoti'. Many photographs of Governors. In the public meeting from 5.30 to 6. About a lakh of people in the meeting. Could not hear anything, though there were loudspeakers. The meeting was wound up earlier as no purse was to be given. One purse of Rs. 500 was given by the Bus Syndicate. Saw the procession of communists taken out as a protest. Popularity of Gandhiji is unbounded. People were crying out 'Gandhiji ki Jai' at the top of their voices.

Supper and prayer. Money poured in like rain this evening. Hundreds of persons flocking in to give.

Gandhiji took the train from Belur. We from Howrah. Got fairly good accommodation. Gandhiji dictated a message to A. P. Slept at 9.30.

XXX

August 9, 1934

In Wardha

(Third Day of Bapu's fast. Gandhiji's health good)

Up at 5.30. Ablutions.

Waited for a long time for Surajmal. He went away to the Ashram, where he had to wait for quite long as Bapu was having a good sleep in the morning.

Sitaram was creating disturbance by indulging in talks with others. But arranged Bapu's programme of travels—monthwise—from January to July.

Barber came, got shaved. Bath and luncheon.

In the room of Bapu from 2 to 6. Sitaram sat there from 2 to 4. But he kept quiet. I wrote one letter to Devidas, Vaidya at Lahore. Read chapters on India from 'Modern World'.

Gandhiji's health very good today. Even better than yesterday. Doctors examined him in the evening. 'Condition good'. Bapu did all the movements without any support. He was reading and talking. I washed his feet after 5.30.

Dr. S. K. Dutta, Principal of Forman College of Lahore came from Delhi. He is a Christian, but a nationalist. A religious man. He was given my room. Though he is accustomed to using a chair and table, he got adjusted to doing without them. He is very simple.

After supper went to the Ashram for prayer. While on return took Dr. Dutta with me. He talked about Harijan work. To bed at 9.30.

XXX

January 6, 1936

In Wardha

(Started for Ahmedabad at night)

Could not get up in the morning earlier. Got up at 6.30 when the bell rang for breakfast, ablutions and breakfast.

Read in the *Times* of Monday that the Gaekwad of Baroda has set apart one crore of rupees for the uplift of 'Raniparaj', 'Harijan', 'Thakardas', 'Rabari' and such other backward communities and backward areas, in commemoration of his Jubilee.

Read comments on Christmas Tree by Elwin in *Social Reformer*. Told Mahadeo about Natarajan's caustic attitude in such small matters.

Read mail at 9.30. Got depressed as no letter from Vallabhbhai. Mahadeo and myself presumed that Vallabhbhai might have fallen ill.

Sat for lunch, but Harilal Gandhi reminded me of invitation from Kishorelal; though the food was served, I got up and went in a 'tonga' to Kishorelal. Talked with him about Deccani versus Gujarati spirit. Talked to Dharmadhikari, Jamnalalji's private secretary, and a public worker about a temple of Chamars of Nagpur.

Met Jamnalalji. He offered his cot to me for my afternoon rest. He himself took rest on the floor. Great man's greatness knows no bounds.

Got up at 2.30. Went to lavatory. Took sugarcane juice. Went to Kanya Ashram to see Gandhiji. Jamnalalji politely prevented me from seeing him and saw him on my behalf. He brought Gandhiji's message to send second telegram to Vallabhbhai.

Returned to Maganwadi in the same 'tongas'. At 3.30 received Vallabhbhai's telegram. Decided to start for Ahmedabad this very night. Went to Jamnalalji's Bungalow at 4.30. Wrote yesterday's and today's diaries and a weekly letter to Poona.

Read the correspondence regarding Sikar between Jamnalalji and Jaipur Government. Took supper in company of Gangadharrao Deshpande.

Prayers on the terrace of the bungalow of Kanya Ashram. Talked with Gandhiji after 7.30 when his silence was broken. He asked me to tell Vallabhbhai and others that if Rs. 29,000 were not collected, he would not rest in peace even after death. Bapu's health not good. His illness is very serious. Went to Maganwadi. Asked Mahadeo to spend more time near Bapu as he was very seriously ill. Left for Bhusaval by Express at 10.15.

xxx

December 7, 1937

In Patna

(In the morning met Binodanand Jha and K.B. Sahay. In the evening met Krishnasingh Babu and Dr. Md. Syed Mahmood. Left for Lucknow at night.)

Up in the morning. Gave Shivam a resolution in 7 parts drafted last night. He immediately typed it.

Binodanand Jha, Parliamentary Secretary, came to see me. He gave general information about Santhal Parganas. An income of Rs. 3 lakhs from one Mahal, the Daminini-Koh area is not spent in the District, but taken to Central account, Rs.50,000 for roads have been received and another amount of Rs. 50,000 for education is expected to be received. He talked about present administration of Bihar.

Got shaved. Bath. Dinner.

Krishnavallabh was expected at 11, but came at 12.15. He was in a hurry to go for a meal. Recommended to him to do something for aborigines. He said that work was not in his hands. Read the resolution and obtained his opinion.

Read the manual on the rules under the Criminal Tribes Act. Shri D. Raghunandan Prasad (of Monghyr) called on me. After some talk with him got sleepy. So slept upto 3 p.m. Was not feeling well as I did not get sleep last night. Slept during day time but it was not beneficial. Jagjivan's car arrived at 5. Went with him in the car and met Srikrishnasinha, Premier, for 15 minutes. He was very courteous. Complained to him against the Education Department. Then sat on the lawn for sometime. One inspector of schools called.

Met Dr. Syed Mahmood at 6. He evaded discussion by simply saying, 'I have too much work and little time. Hence appoint a committee of three including Shri Jagjivan and Shri Vindhya Babu. I will agree with their decisions.'

Returned home. Had a meal. Packed bedding—to station by car. Picked up Jagjivan from his house on the way.

Train arrived at 9.30 instead of 8.30. Got a good seat and good sleep too.

xxx

September 4, 1939

In Shillong.

(To Gauhati in the afternoon. Speech at Cotton College)

Up at 6 a.m. Ablutions. Study. Morning spent in study and seeing visitors.

At 8.30 Representative, A.P.I., came to see me. Dictated some information. He promised to send to several newspapers.

Swami of Ramakrishna Mission, President of R. K. Mission Committee (Bengali gentleman, Retired Director of Agriculture), came to see me. He gave an account of Cherrapunji and Rolla M. E. Schools and asked for help. Some questions to Sonaram Dutt from his booklet, removed his doubts. Read the list of schools—primary as well as secondary which received Government grants this year.

Saw the details from budget estimate, regarding an amount of Rs. 1,45,000 placed under the direct supervision of the Governor for education in excluded area of Naga and Lushai Hills. Saw different figures in the budget and list of new proposals for 1939-40. After 12 to Sharat Chandra Goswami for food, taking him from his office. His daughter and his wife were present. His daughter speaks good English. His wife seemed very kind. She invited me to be her guest at Jorhat.

At 1-45 to the bungalow of Gopinath. Upendranath came with his car to take us to Gauhati. Packed the luggage at the back of the car and left at 2-30.

Driver was very competent and knew English etiquette. He was driving very fast. On the way, at the bus station, Nong-Po, Kerkchandra Dolai and Bilasrai Khemani came to meet me. Talked about Assam, Dibrugarh and girls schools.

Reached Gauhati at 6. Read the mail. Received a telegram to reach Delhi early. Committee will meet at Delhi instead of Calcutta. Birlaji might have gone there.

Gave a lecture on mass literacy at Cotton College from 7-30 to 8-30. P. C. Roy, the acting principal, and Professor Bhuia were present. Had supper. Slept in small open room outside at 10 without writing diary.

XXX

October 5, 1940

In Hyderabad, Sind

(Educational institutions from 8-30 to 1, from 5 to 10, Nari Shala, Harijan bastis, and public meeting of Harijans.)

Up at 6.30. Ablutions, shave and bath. Started at 8.30. First went to 'Mira High School' of Sadhu Vaswani. Prayer, congratulations by Secretary. Short speeches by Rameshwari Nehru and me. Then visited Gurdashmal Hindu High School of 600 students, where I read my visit notes of 1936. Then visited the Seva Ashram of 'Bapa', Kishanchand, situated on the bank of Fuleli, at a distance of about 2 miles. Spinning, weaving carding, ghani, etc., going on well. Visited a school of Kumhar boys located in a building donated from the trust of the father of Pratap. The school is conducted by Prof. Vaswani, Gulab and his mother. Visited the compounds of Kumhars. They are very dirty. Visited a Government school and the basti of 1,000 houses of Jatias and of 400 houses of Chamars. Saw about 16 to 20 tenements constructed by the Municipality of Vishin Nagar.

Came home at 1. Luncheon and rest. Got up at 3-30. Read the mail received at 4. Read newspapers.

Function for women in Nari Shala from 5 to 6. Rameshwari Malkani spoke well. Visited Thakarbai Bal Mandir for the children of Meghwals. Visited the 'Dahi' Basti of Bhangis; the bathrooms are very bad. One hundred and fifty Hindu Bhangis in all live there. Saw Gandhi Nagar of Meghwal Bhangis near the school.

Went to the meeting of Harijans held in the Ramkrishna compound. Dr. Chimandas, Rameshwari, myself spoke. Gudibai (a very, good singer) sang.

Returned home at 9. Supper at 10. To bed at 11. Wrote diary.

XXX

April 4, 1942

In Delhi

(Fever, Birlaji, Rajendra Babu and Mahadeobhai called on me. Jivanlalbhai arrived.)

In the morning, Jivanlalbhai (Harakhchand's brother) arrived, with his two sons from Lahore. They were lodged in the house opposite to ours and arrangements for their meals, etc., were made. Mohanlal went out with them to Birla House in the afternoon.

Had fever the whole day; took about 28 grains of quinine.

Birlaji phoned to the effect that the dates for the annual meeting of the C.B. have been postponed to 28th and 29th instant, from 14th and 15th, in consultation with Bapu. Shyamlalji went to Birla House. A circular was sent out regarding the change of dates, along with the Agenda.

Bapu left for Wardha by the G.T. Express.

Mahadeobhai, G. D. Birlaji and Rajendra Babu had kindly called on me at 5.30. Birlaji told me that the land at Nasik has been bought by the Birla Trust and that the money which had to be paid to Jivanlal is placed at Bapu's disposal for Go-seva work. It was suggested that I should pass the whole of May in Nasik and begin the work of building on that land. Bapu sent his message to me with Birlaji.

At night Kakasaheb Kalelkar came and met me and suggested that I should write my biography. I said that I am not competent for that work.

XXX

February 17, 1943

In Poona

(3 p.m. D.P.I.'s Office; 6 p.m. met Gandhiji, in the Aga Khan Palace. Resignations of Modi, Aney and Sarkar.)

Up at 7 a.m., awakened by the coming of Amtus Salam from Bombay unexpectedly. Heard what she had come for. Put her up in one of the rooms.

Breakfast. Read the morning *Times of India*. Got shaved.

At about 9 went to the phone in the Press. Talked with Jail Superintendent of the Aga Khan palace, then with Col. Bhandari, then again with Jail Superintendent regarding time for Amtus Salam meeting with Gandhiji as permission got.

Incidentally, Col. Bhandari told me that I too had got permission to see Gandhiji. 6 p.m. wash fixed for it.

11 to 11.45 dictated letters to clerk Kale, who typed them for me upto 2 p.m. and they were ready for despatch.

At 2.30 left by tonga for D.P.I.'s Office. Worked with him from 3 to 4.15. Corrected yesterday's proceedings and settled the items of yesterday, viz., primary hostels and agricultural bias schools, and thereafter worked with Nene, and discussed about the place proposed by departmental offices for locating primary hostels.

Waited on road-side at 5 p.m. for taxi in which brother and Amtus carne and we went to Bidhan Roy. He gave medical news and good advice to Amtus not to worry Gandhiji by questions. We were taken in to the Aga Khan Palace at 6. Had a frank talk with Bapu; rather he talked mostly. Amtus had little time. Met all others. Ba is very washed out. Sarojini as cheerful as ever—Miraben with fever.

Returned to Bidhan Roy who gave news of three resignations. Went to Lakshmibai Rajwade and talked with her (Amtus). Returned at 8 p.m. Amtus and Ramanrao (Mandeshwer's son-in-law) dined with us. Talks with Vaze up to 11. Slept at 11.

xxx

July, 15, 1944

In Delhi

(12 to 1 Office. 1 to 7-30 outing- (1) K. B. Ashram, (2) J. K. Birla, and (3) Pandit M. N. Dar. Hot Dayal.)

Up at 6-30. Ablutions. Barber came early and I got shaved. Account books. Welfare account books with Namboodri. The mistake was there in summary, but could find it only in the evening. There was a serious mistake of Rs. 1,000 in the carrying forward of bank balance one day. Lakshman Singh, Hariji's accountant, brought the accounts of Balika Ashram—he goes into them thoroughly.

Sat with Hariji and Lakshman Singh over his 1944-45 budget. Increased the income side by Rs. 5 to 6 thousand. Total budget goes above 60 thousand. Those who get Rs. 40 will get Rs. 45 from 1st October next. On the whole it is not very expensive.

Dined and read letters. Office work 12 to 1. Dictated letter to Dr. Katju regarding my visit to U.P.

In Birla's car Hariji, Tula Ram, Gopal Lal, Motilal, Shiv Ram and I went to (1) Khadi Bhandar and (2) Kasturba Balika Ashram. Here we spent nearly four hours, talked with teachers, saw buildings and grounds, saw classes, drill. Took a Garhwal girl and rejected two daughters of Sushila Devi, Amba, wife of

Prabhudas Gandhi, and her two daughters admitted as teacher and taught.

Jugal Kishoreji talked freely regarding Mandla Gonds and aboriginal tribes. He gave 10 scholarships of Rs 15 each for aboriginal boys to Hariji.

Went to Pandit Dar on Curzon Road. He complained of Tulsiram regarding Vaidya. Land transfer deed not yet made.

Saw Okhla Headworks of the Jamuna Canal hastily between. 2 and 3. Returned to Colony at 7-40. Prayers-Meal-Shyamlal's home life is now happy, Shyantlal's fever having gone.

Slept early at 9.20, being tired due to having moved about in the hot sun.

XXX

September 9, 1944

In Bombay

(Gandhi-Jinnah Day-Trustees' Meeting of K.G.N.M. Fund)

Up at 7-15. Ablutions. Got shaved in the shop below. Bath. Milk. Had a hasty glance at the papers.

Out at 9-30. Kishan put me in the bus at the Opera House. It was an extraordinary day with elaborate police arrangements. Use of Nepean Sea Road was restricted. Even Sir P.T. (Purushotam das Thakurdas) was stopped at the Hanging Garden.

To Birla House at 10-15. Rajaji was there. All the trains—G.L.P., Nagpur Mail and B. B. Frontier Mail were late by 3 hours. Dined at 11 and stayed at home. Studied the Trust Deed and made notes of doubtful points, for decision in the meeting of tonight.

Gandhiji came home at 1-40 p.m. The house was astir. His rooms were arranged. 16-man party and 102 packages. Jehangir Patel too had gone there.

After rest he left for Jinnah's place at 4.

Nagarkar was active enough to get audited accounts for Rs. 56.35 lakhs up to 31st August signed by Auditors—Dalal and Shah.

Went to the Society at 4-30. Dictated the Society's report and got it typed by Lakhi. His wife had no fever today. Met Khandubhai and Nanda regarding contributions of Ahmedabad Majoor Mahajan.

Dined in Birla House at 8-30. Gandhiji decided in Ahmedabad matter that if the contribution was to be used in Ahmedabad for maternity home, it cannot be taken as a part of Kasturba Fund.

9 to 10.15—Trustees' meeting. J.R.D. was sitting next to me. All sat on the floor. Sir P.T., C.R. and others attended. Details of Trust Deed settled. Secretary's report read. If possible 75 lakhs should be collected. Came home at 10.30.

XXX

September 16, 1944

In Bombay

(Morning Gandhiji. 12.30 to 5—office—Evening: Birla House and prayers and discussions)

Up at 6.10, when the driver from Birla House woke me. Hurried and left at 6.40.

With Gandhiji—7 to 7.30. Discussed district committees for Kasturba Fund and types of Institutions to be started. Wrote letters to Satish Babu, Jajujee, Aryanayakam and V. L. Mehta.

Read papers in Devdas' room up to 9, but he did not wake up. Talked with R.D. Home at 9.40.

L.N. had no fever, but is weak. Bath. Drafted circular and letter to G.D., Calcutta.

Dined and to office. From Bor Bunder M.P. Gandhi picked me up and left me in Scindia House.

Correspondence. The figure of collection, made up yesterday at 69 lakhs is increasing. Gujarat adds one lac, Tamilnad 22.66 lakhs and others. Sent out press message about the same, as exceeding 70 lakhs.

Left office, walking some distance, taking bus to J. J. hospital, then by tram. Got Birla House car to go there. Talked to Devdas, Mridula and V. L. Mehta about Wardha function details.

Attended Rungta House prayers. Lot of attendance. Money.

Had a meal there. Talked to pakwasa, Munshi, Rajaji, etc. about Trust matters, which must be expedited. Left Birla House at 10.40 with Navalchand and' Deshpande. Bed at 11.

xxx

November 29, 1944

In Bombay

(Birthday felicitations—Rs. 1,001 given away. Visited American W.I. Library at Hornby Road.)

Today was day of festivals. The *Nutan Gujarat*, *Janmabhumi* and *Lokmanya*, all the three papers of Amritlal Sheth, had publicised my 75th birthday a good deal.

Amritlal Sheth and his party, daughter and son came about 8, garlanded me and had me photographed (by Kirti Krishna Ladia) and sang a song and presented Rs. 1001 which I after words sent away to (1) Satana Dang Seva Mandal and (2) Appa Patwardhan for Kunbi Seva Sang.

The whole day visitors poured in up to 7.30 p.m. and even after 9 p.m. Kasturba Trust Office people and V. L. Mehta at 5.30 p.m.

Pakwasa and his son and daughter-in-law. Durlabji and his brother Rasiklal Parikh (Kathiawar matter). Naranbhai Bhat and B. N. Motiwala. Maganbhai Patel and his father Bhatabhai and a friend. The young Jain friend of Jain Lodge. One unknown friend with his son and two daughters at 10 p.m. and some others.

I was thrice feasted today. Dined with Amritlal Sheth on Marine Drive at 5 p.m., with Dinkar Desai and his father—and at night at 8 p.m. with Navalchand T. Shah. Birla Mansions.

Dinkar took me between 2 and 4 p.m. to the American War Information Library. It is a first class institution—furniture of excellent teak, and arrangement very nice. All new American books of 1939 to 1944,

Perhaps this day may turn my head and make me prouder than I am. But I must use it to make me humbler.

I was happy in sending away the two sums of Rs. 500 each for the two backward class welfare works.

Slept at 10 quietly.

Lakshmi Das' older son had got high fever. Wrote a long letter to Dahyabhai and him at Dohad.

XXX

September 19, 1945

(Whole day in the train from Gooty to Kurudwady, C. R.'s election declared invalid by Tamil Nad P.C.C.)

Dr. Rajan was a companion in the train from Madras—also from one N.W.F. retired police officer from Guntakal—a Namazi Muslim.

Read in the papers about C.R.'s election from Tiruchengode Talk Congress Committee as declared invalid by Tamil Nad P.C.C. Also Andhra P.C.C. asked Congress President not to invite C.R. to Congress Working Committee in Poona.

Wrote diary for three days—17th, 18th and 19th—in the afternoon. Had a good sleep up to 3 p.m.

Signed papers (3 only) typed yesterday afternoon—at 5.45 p.m. in the train.

Read from Jagadisan 'The Other Harmony' and Shastri's speech on 'Rishi Ranade'.

xxx

December 21, 1945

In Delhi

(Office work 10 to 5. Met Pandit Kunzru in New Delhi)
Up at 6.45. Night was very cold. After ablutions I saw both cash books and signed them.

I read part of the *Hindustan Times* and then Tyagi read to me, when I was dining in the front verandah in the sun. Kishan shaved me. Had bath.

Went to office early at 10. Shivam was there, so I utilised his services. Today I took a lot of work from Ramcharan, both for Hindi and English letters. He read to me the third half-yearly

report of the ad hoc committee on the action taken by various departments.

Looked into the monthly bill of Okhla Balika Ashram and found that the expenditure of the last three months had exceeded the budgeted amount.

Wrote to Sucheta about Maharashtra—Prema Kantak and Sushila Pai affair. She left Delhi for Ahmedabad last night. This was told to me by Principal Madani on the phone.

Tried but failed to contact by Delhi Congress people by phone regarding the work of engineer Gulati.

Hariji brought from Calcutta the cheque for Rs. 25,000, being the contribution of M. P. Birla for Udyogshala.

After 5 went in the 'Khadkhad' with Shivam to New Delhi. Chandrakant of Godhara read from Shukla's book on CR's the way. Kunzru came from Allahabad, and went to meet Hansraj Gupta. Talked with him regarding Malaya Indians affairs. Dr. P. P Pillao came there and talked of Madras and C.R's politics. Came home at 8.45. Had a meal. Diary. To bed at 9.30:

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April 18, 1946

In New Delhi

[(Gandhiji's Camp)—Had fever the whole day. Read of the death of Shastriyar.]

Today the whole day was spent in bed. Besides the diarrhoea, fever began to rise from 9 a.m. It went up to 102 degrees and came down to 100 degrees in the afternoon.

Dr. Sushila attends on me with care and she must have seen me not less than half a dozen times. Shivam was here upto

6 p.m. Also Tyagi had come for some hours. Morning's paper announced the death of Shastriyar on the night of 16th. A great patriot is gone. Gandhiji issued a statement about him. Rao Bahadur Chandavarkar came in the morning and brought barley and pomegranate for us. He goes to Sukkur tomorrow.

G. D. Birla called at about 12 and suggested my being sent to Joshi's Nursing Home if the temperature does not go down.

Cripps called on Gandhiji for an hour and a half. He went to Lord P. Lawrence in the afternoon.

Wrote a letter to Jagadisan regarding the death of Shastriyar.

xxx

July 24, 1946

(Mandla to Jabalpure and Jabalpure to Dindori, 150 miles)

Dr. Barlinge with D.C. went to Manot—18 miles on the direct Dindori road—to see the submerged causeway and came back at 8. A raised causeway should' be built there.

We left Mandla at 8 straight for Jabalpure and put up in the Circuit House and got food prepared for both the parties. Read *Leader* and *Bharat* of today. Pressman Narad came and gave his news.

Dr. Bailinge's party (but not he) was sent ahead at 2. p.m. S. S. P. Bailinge, Kher and I went at 3 in D.C.'s car. Then followed our lorry. The first reached Dindori at 7 p.m. the second at 9 p.m. and the third after 10 p.m. A few causeways are built high, a large number of others are not paved at all, and a few are dug out on the lower side. The road is second class.

Saw the school of 100 boys at Kundam in Patan Tehsil. It may be converted into a middle school with hostel. The school at Shahpura was closed.

Barlinge's party was put up in the rest house, one mile away on the hill. Vanikar and I with the tehsildar and D.C., D.S.P. and Kher in the Sarai. Both the parties dined with Dal Chand Jain who had managed it well for about 30 persons.

I was tired but not much and slept without a break in the comfortable house of the tehsildar.

The road requires improvement urgently. Both the schools require middle sections plus hostels, without doubt, for the Gonds. The D.C. was very helpful on the way. Driving the motor over the causeway at Shahpur was dangerous but well-managed.

The talk about narrow village roads or foot-paths with Barlinge was amusing. Gulati, engineer, mentioned that the country is picturesque but thinly populated and had wild animals.

Amritlal Vithaldas Thakkar, popularly known as Thakkar Bapa, was a social worker who worked for the uplift of the downtrodden and tribals. Very early in life, he gave up a lucrative job only to devote his time to the service of the oppressed. Beginning from his home state Gujarat, he soon covered the whole country in providing relief - be it flood, famine, earthquake or just economic and social backwardness.

India owes it to the tireless efforts of this man that the provisions included in the Constitution of India for safeguarding the interests of the tribals and their development could become a reality.

The author of this book, Viyogi Hari, a Gandhian and a prominent Hindi writer was also a constant companion of Bapa.

